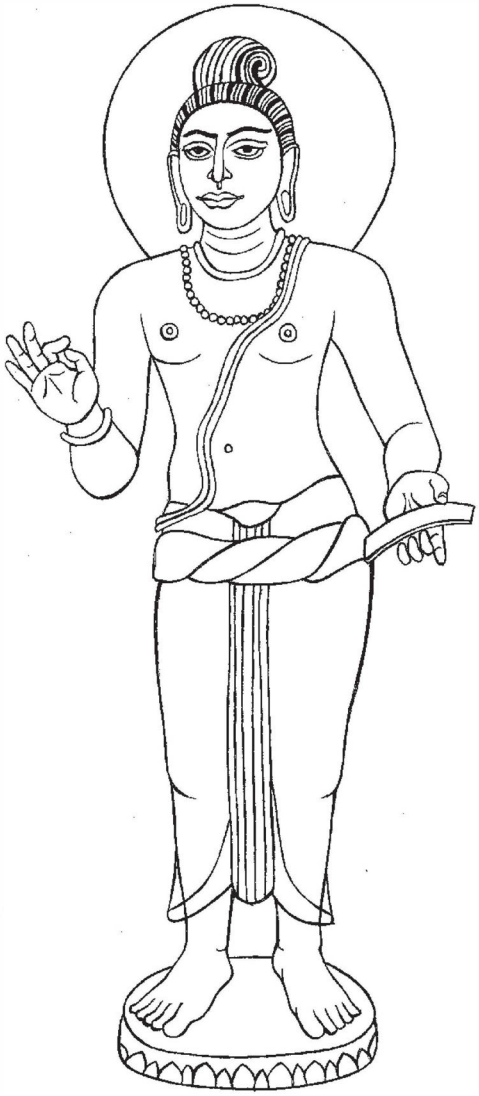
# Study Guide to

# *The Foundations of Yoga*



**Traditional Yoga Studies**
**Saskatchewan, Canada**

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—*Traditional Yoga Studies*



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*The cover drawing by James Rhea is of Kapila, the legendary founder of Sâmkhya.*

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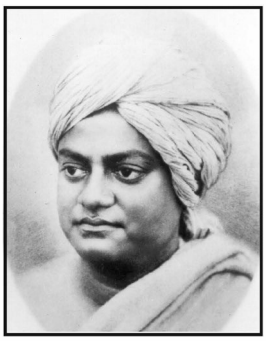

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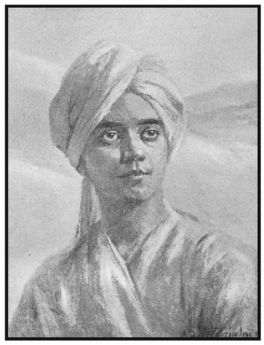

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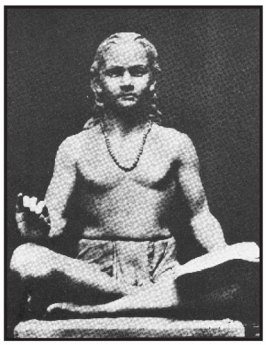

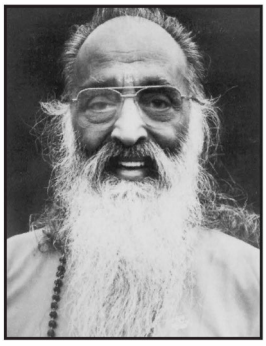

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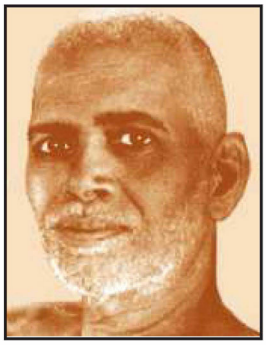

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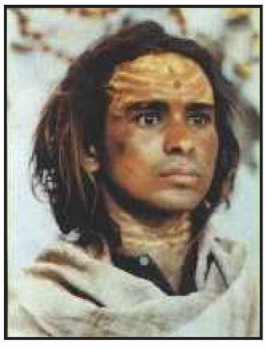

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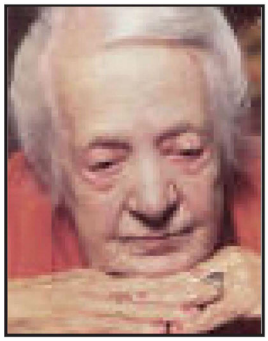

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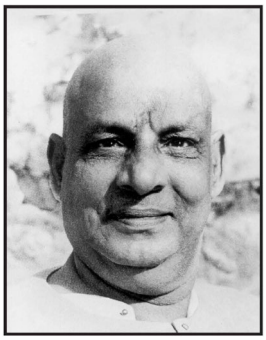

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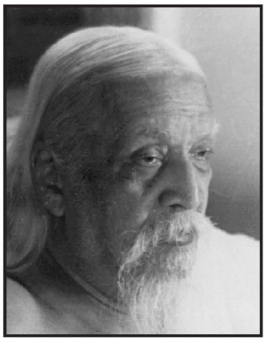
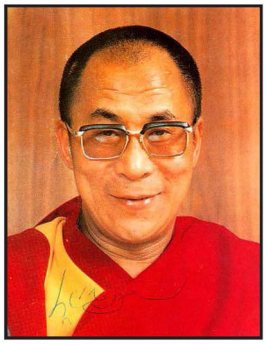




## A Bit of Advice . . .

This distance-learning course is meant for your education and enjoyment . . . hopefully in equal proportions. If your education in Yoga does not eventually contribute to your happiness (and not merely temporary pleasure), we must question its usefulness. The ideas captured in this Study Guide should lead you, step by step, not only to a better understanding of Yoga but also to a more profound self-understanding.

A better understanding of Yoga can help you find those precious nuggets of wisdom within the Yoga tradition that inevitably will stimulate your inner growth. Of the value of self-understanding there can be little doubt. Without it we are at the mercy of our unconscious and our negative emotions.

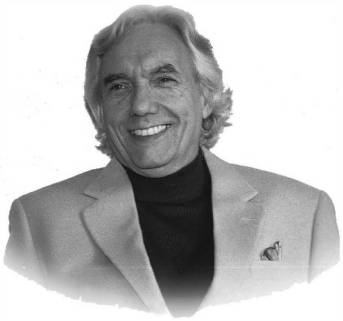
In offering this course, I am making the assumption that you and all other students are eager to both acquire intellectual knowledge about the world's most diversified and oldest spiritual heritage and to benefit directly from its wisdom teachings.

Having said all this, it is my sincere hope that you will approach this course with an open mind and a relaxed body. Please don't feel you are racing against time or competing with other students. Do make your study enjoyable and rewarding.

I look forward to hearing from you and assisting you in your studies.

In Yoga,

# PREFACE TO THIS STUDY GUIDE
# by Georg Feuerstein



Georg Feuerstein

The seed for the present distance-learning course was planted while putting the finishing touches on the manuscript for *The Yoga Tradition*. As I began to appreciate the enormous mass of information readers of *The Yoga Tradition* would be facing, I concluded that the best way to unlock its richness would be to write a separate Study Guide.

I did just that back in 2002 when I created an 800-hour course, which took all of 3,000 hours to complete with the help of James H. Bae (Jagadish Dasa). More than 200 people struggled through that extensive distance-learning course, which is still available from TYS today.

The present 250-hour course **The Foundations of Yoga** represents an expanded version of the first segment of the 800-hour course and is intended as an entirely self-contained unit. As its title suggests, the present distance-learning course focuses on the cultural and philosophical foundations of Yoga and is intended to give students a broad overview, which helps them in their study of Part One of *The Yoga Tradition* (pp. xxv–88), covering the first three chapters, as well as their study of Yoga in general.

It is my belief that anyone who has carefully gone through the materials furnished in those three chapters of *The Yoga Tradition* and in the present Study Guide will have a good starting point for delving into Yoga's history and philosophy, as expounded in the other related TYS distance-learning courses.

Following closely the content and organization of Part One of *The Yoga Tradition* book, **The Foundations of Yoga** distance learning course:

- fills in some of the bigger and many smaller gaps in *The Yoga Tradition*
- rounds out the discussion with additional study materials and source readings



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- furnishes additional bibliographic information, which had to be omitted in the *The Yoga Tradition* book
- provides diagrams and other illustrations for easier comprehension
- gives a series of exercises and questions for reflection to promote assimilation and integration of the materials
- includes homework assignments in the form of *For Reflection* questions, questionnaires, and an essay.

This course is geared toward facilitating what can be called *svâdhyâya-yoga*, the "Yoga of study." This consists in:

- studying the yogic teachings
- self-study in light of these teachings, in the sense of delving into one's own mind in order to discover one's true resonance with the teachings of Yoga

The ancient *Shata-Patha*-("Hundred Paths")-*Brâhmana*, an extensive Sanskrit text on Vedic rituals from c. 2000 B.C., states: "When properly pursued, *svâdhyâya* improves one's health and increases one's inner delight." In this sense, may your study of Yoga be fruitful, life-enhancing, and joyous. Happy studying!



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# PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS

## I. How to Study

### 1. The Difficulties of Self-Study

The autodidact faces a number of challenges, which call for:

- strong motivation
- self-reliance
- love of learning
- open-mindedness

**Abbreviations**

**SG** = Study Guide

**YT** = *The Yoga Tradition* by Georg Feuerstein (second edition or later)

Self-study can be impeded by:

- impatience
- laziness
- misunderstanding from not reading attentively
- not seeing the practical relevance and value of the study material
- lack of confidence
- lack of organization
- a sense of lack of progress

### 2. Remedial Action

- In case of impatience, remind yourself that it takes time to assimilate new knowledge. The tree of knowledge grows slowly, but it yields beautiful fruit. When you hit a period of self-doubt and overwhelm, you might want to go back to earlier lessons and previous assignments, especially your For Reflection answers, and you will undoubtedly see that you have made good progress.
- When you feel lazy, take a pause, center yourself, and recollect why you made the commitment to work on this course. By contemplating the larger picture, you should be able to re-motivate yourself. Perhaps also get some fresh air and breathe deeply and vigorously. This should remove physical fatigue and any mental cobwebs. This course


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requires a healthy dose of persistence. If persistence is not your strong side, then you now have an excellent opportunity for cultivating this wonderful virtue.

- If you discover that you misunderstood something, ask yourself whether you rushed through the material instead of going step by step. Inattentiveness is one of the obstacles on the yogic path. This is a common problem with students!
- If you don't see the practical relevance of a particular argument or discussion, instead of being dismissive, take a moment to consider the following: (1) The educators who have assembled this distance learning course are Yoga practitioners themselves and wish to promote your own practice of Yoga. (2) The overall purpose of this course is to provide the necessary context for actual practice. (3) All yogic concepts were created in an environment of practice. Not every idea or fact mentioned in this course necessarily has a practical application on its own, but in conjunction with other ideas and facts, it is likely to be relevant to practice. Even a historical date gains significance when viewed in tandem with other dates or ideas. For instance, you might ask: Does it matter whether I know that Patanjali lived c. 150 A.D.? The answer is No. But if you want to understand Patanjali's philosophy and practice more deeply, it is useful to know that he was preceded by many other masters and teachings and, in turn, inspired subsequent teachers. It is good to appreciate that Patanjali's system is wedged between what we call Pre-Classical Yoga and Post-Classical Yoga and was very likely influenced by Mahâyâna Buddhism. The teachings of each era have a certain flavor, which can give you a summary understanding of the spiritual path or aspects of it.

**The yogic practice of studying (called *svâdhyâya*) requires a positive mind-set and, in turn, helps you strengthen all those personality traits that create a positive mind-set.**

- Sometimes students are beleaguered with lack of self-confidence. Just remember that you actually took the initiative of enrolling for this course. This took self-confidence and vision. Don't buy into any self-doubt. **Simply do your best and enjoy your growing insight into yourself and the yogic process.**

**No effort is ever wasted.**

*—Bhagavad-Gîtâ (2.40)*

- It is true that lack of organization can hamper your studies. But this is easily remedied. Just follow the structure we have provided in this course. Keep all your notes in the same place as your course material. Label them by chapter, as we have done. Use a highlighter to emphasize important parts in the Study Guide or your own notes. Don't scribble but write legibly. Avoid squeezing too much information on a page from your notepad; let the page breathe.
- If you have a sense that you aren't making much progress, hold it right there! Have you worked through the materials diligently? If yes, then don't judge the speed. Take the time to assimilate everything. There's lots to learn. If no, then the problem isn't one of progress but perhaps one of laziness or lack of consistency (see above). Keep


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a positive attitude toward yourself and your studies. Think of all the other students throughout the world who are sitting somewhere quietly working through this distance learning course. You aren't alone! Progress is not the issue. Learning is. Are you learning? If so, then you are also growing, even though you may not be able to assess your growth right now. **Three months, six months, or two years from now, you will be able to tell better just how much "progress" you have made.** As time goes by, you will realize that you understand the ongoing conversations about Yoga a lot better.

## II. Course Objectives

Our primary concern is to help you expand your knowledge and understanding of the yogic heritage, from the most ancient teachings to contemporary schools. We will present the core concepts of yogic thought as well as the major spiritual practices that make up Indic Yoga. By examining Yoga from a variety of perspectives, you will be able to formulate your own personal understanding of the essence of the yogic teachings in a balanced manner. More specifically, upon successfully completing this course you will be able to reflect soundly on the relevance of traditional Yoga for our present time. This rounded knowledge, for instance, will be helpful in avoiding the widespread errors of (a) reductionism, (b) hasty innovation, and (c) over-adaptation.

*Reductionism* seeks to reduce Yoga in some form, whether it be to fitness training or religion. By *hasty innovation* we mean the trendy practice among Western practitioners to invent their own yogic technology before really knowing traditional Yoga. *Over-adaptation* refers to another contemporary trend, which is to go overboard with adapting Indic practices and ideas to our Western context (or preferences), sometimes to the point where the adaptations become hasty innovations or reductionistic, or both.

We hope to make the systematic study of *The Yoga Tradition* more accessible, more enjoyable, and also experiential. For better access, this distance learning course supplies translations of additional source readings from the Sanskrit literature, as well as insightful articles. In addition, we have provided further suggested readings as well as homework assignments that involve personal study of core Yoga texts. This is to equip you for an independent study of Yoga.

We also wish to give you, as a prospective or presently committed practitioner, a deeper understanding of the dynamics of personal transformation. **A fruitful study of Yoga philosophy is one that gives insight into spiritual development—its goal, stages, obstacles, and benefits—so that you can engage in the practice of Yoga in a progressive and informed manner.**


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As part of this course, a tutor is assigned to assist with any significant questions relating to the subject matter of this course which you were unable to find covered in the course materials and also to evaluate your progress by giving you feedback on all questionnaires and your final essay to be submitted in order to qualify for a certificate of completion. Please understand that **your tutor will not be able to respond to personal problems or questions not relating directly to the course material.** Other than that, your tutor would be happy to facilitate your learning.

# III. Organization of the Materials in this Study Guide

For your convenience, we have structured the materials in the Study Guide as follows:

## 1. Main Points

The main points of each section basically summarize the relevant treatment in *The Yoga Tradition*. Occasionally we elaborate on a topic for your better understanding or to round out the treatment given in *The Yoga Tradition* book.

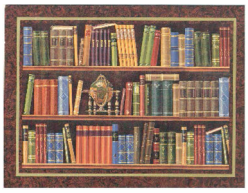
## 2. Additional Study Materials

In order to elucidate a topic that is only touched on in *The Yoga Tradition* book or warrants further treatment, we supply additional essays.

## 3. Additional Source Readings

The Study Guide also includes additional translations from the Sanskrit, which are intended to help you get a better sense of studying in the context of Yoga. Thus, the present course contains several source readings not found in *The Yoga Tradition* book, which you need to study.

## 4. Further Reading (and Listening)



For eager students, or further study in the future, we include in most sections suggestions for further reading. Please note that you do *not* need to read the listed publications to complete the present course. Some of the suggested readings are difficult to obtain, but we have included them because they are important for in-depth study of a given topic, and they should be available in some specialized libraries or, for sale, from online bookstores specializing in hard-to-obtain items. You do need to listen to the audiorecording *The Lost Teachings of Yoga*!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## 6. For Reflection

The questions given under "For Reflection" are **not** obligatory but are designed to stimulate your assimilation, integration, and subjective interpretation of source materials and key philosophical points. They are meant to challenge you and help your understanding through introspection. We suggest that you keep a notebook containing your responses to our questions in the "For Reflection" category, **but you do not need to submit your responses to the For Reflection questions unless your tutor asks for them.** The For Reflection assignments are furnished simply in the spirit of traditional yogic education and the ideal of *svâdhyâya*. Thus the Vedânta model of pedagogy, as expounded by Shankara, involves three important aspects:

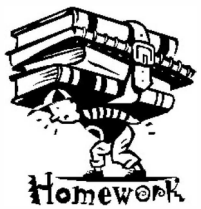
- hearing (*shravana*) the teachings
- pondering (*manana*) the teachings
- meditating (*nididhyâsana*) upon the teachings

In the present case, "hearing" is imbibing the teachings through the written word. "Pondering" is considering them in the context of your own life. "Meditating" means making certain teaching points the subject of deep meditative reflection. For instance, you could make the topic of renunciation (*samnyâsa*) into a full-fledged meditation.

To give an example of *nididhyâsana*: Sit still, with your back straight, regulate (harmonize) your breathing, and then take, for instance, the topic of renunciation (*samnyâsa*) as the focal point of meditation. Picture yourself in the shoes of a traditional Hindu who has just resolved to leave the householder stage behind and devote the rest of his or her life to the ideal of renunciation. In your mind, say good-bye to your loved ones (whom you will never see again), tell your boss that you are becoming a renouncer and so must resign, and give away all your belongings, one by one. Examine the feelings that come up for you when doing this mental exercise.

**Many of our students have discovered the great value of the For Reflection questions, and for some of them these questions have become even more important than the information provided in the course. In other words, please don't skip over them!**

## 7. Homework




This is the logo for homework assignments

The homework assignments make up a vital component of every section in this Study Guide. **There are a total of 12 submittable homework assignments** and **one essay**. You need to submit all questionnaires and the essay to TYS for evaluation by your tutor *only* if you wish to receive a certificate. Some homework assignments have practical assignments, which we encourage you to take as seriously as the written or audial tasks. **In order to complete this course and qualify for a certificate of completion, you**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**are expected to do all homework assignments.**

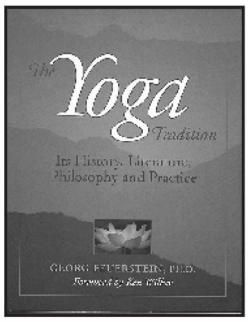
We will assess your familiarity with, and grasp of the subject matter, primarily on the basis of your submitted questionnaires and the essay. For more details about the homework assignments, notably the essay, see below. If your tutor is unsure about your competence in certain areas of study, you might be asked to submit your written responses to any of the "For Reflection" questions.

**Please understand that you are not automatically entitled to a certificate of completion.** You really must fulfill all the criteria mentioned in the present section!

# IV. Course Requirements

## 1. Required Reading and Listening

- Georg Feuerstein's book *The Yoga Tradition* (2d rev. edition, 2001, or later editions), which is the foundation of TYS's present distance-learning course. Kindly note that the pagination of the first edition of this book differs from the pagination of subsequent editions and will not work easily with the course. We therefore strongly recommend that you acquire the second or a subsequent edition even if you already own a copy of the first edition.
- Georg Feuerstein's *The Encyclopedia of Yoga and Tantra,* published by Shambhala Publications.
- Six CDs or equivalent audio downloads labeled *The Lost Teachings of Yoga*, produced by Sounds True. **(<u>Start this course by listening to these tapes!</u>)**
- All materials in the present Study Guide




Make sure you have the second edition or a subsequent edition!

**The above course materials (including the CD/audio downloads) are available from TYS (www.traditonalyogastudies.com) or directly from their respective publishers.**

As mentioned earlier, in the sections entitled "Further Reading," we have provided lists of publications on each subject for further study. **Please note that the books listed under "Further Reading" are NOT required reading and therefore you do *not need* to purchase them for this course.**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## 2. Homework Assignments

As mentioned before, this course includes a total of **12 homework assignments**, which consist chiefly in 12 questionnaires to be submitted plus one essay.

***It is important that you read this section on homework carefully!***

To complete this distance learning course and qualify for a certificate from TYS, you must do all 12 homework assignments and the essay within the span of **18 months** (**but not earlier than 12 months!**) starting from the receipt of our materials. An **extension** of up to **6 months** is possible (though there will be an extension fee of $75).

Homework includes the following:

- **Listening assignment:** We ask you to listen to the six CDs or audiocassettes and reflect on them.
- **Reading assignments**: We ask you to simply read a section in the Study Guide or *The Yoga Tradition* book, or both.
- **Answering the 12 questionnaires:** Toward the end of each section, we ask you to test your knowledge about the materials in the course and submit your answers to the questionnaires. If you have a technical question about any of the questionnaires, which is not covered in this course, you may consult your tutor by email. Please read the course materials carefully, because all relevant questions are covered.

**Make these five points your checklist before submitting an essay.**

- **Writing an essay:** This course includes **one essay**, which must be submitted to TYS in addition to the 12 questionnaire answers in order to receive a certificate at the end of your studies. (Don't panick yet! We say more about the essay below.)
- **Engaging a yogic practice:** Since Yoga is a continuum of theory and practice, this course includes also some very practical exercises, such as reflection, self-observation, meditation, and service.

## 3. Essay

### *(A) Rules for Submitting the Essay*

This distance learning course involves writing **one essay of at least 2,500 but no more than 3,500 words.** Note that we are more interested in content and understanding than grammar, style, etc. Originality is welcome, but we expect your treatment to be grounded in the traditional teachings of Yoga, as taught in this course and supplemented by your own additional reading. A practical alternative to essay writing will be considered (see p. 372 for more information).


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- **Type** your essay using Microsoft Word. If you are working on a MacIntosh, convert your Word file into a PC readable file, ideally into RTF (Rich Text Format), which retains all formatting. Please do *not* include images in your file, as the file will get too big.
- Use **single spacing.**
- **Number** all pages consecutively.
- **Type your name and email address, course title, and date** at the top of your essay and all other communications to TYS.
- Include your **bibliographical sources** by giving (1) the author's full name, (2) title of book or article, (3) date of publication, (4) and page number. Also duly acknowledge Internet sources! People don't always know that Internet materials are automatically copyright protected unless stated otherwise.
- **Proofread** as carefully as possible (remember the computer's spellchecker!).
- **Please do not include images or ornamental pages in your essay. Also kindly do not use type larger than 12 points. This will keep the bytes down to a workable size for electronic submissions.**
- **Send the essay as an email attachment** to TYS. Do NOT paste your essay into the email itself.
- **We warn against PLAGIARISM. Please do not succumb to the temptation of simply copying materials from the Internet and passing it off as your own. You would be expelled (and no refund either)!**

**A good essay must have this permanent quality about it: it must draw its curtain round us, but it must be a curtain that shuts us in, not out.**

**—Virginia Woolf**

If you don't observe the above etiquette, your submission may be returned to you unread.

## *(B) How to Compose an Essay*

- **Theme:** In one sentence state the theme of your essay.
- **Introduction:** In the first paragraph, establish the main points that you will address in your essay.
- **Body:** Arguing as clearly and succinctly as possible, deal with each stated point and support your argument by referring to relevant texts. Use actual quotations sparingly. An essay consisting mostly of quoted materials will not pass. We want to read YOUR thoughts. Feel free to make use of the recommended readings or any other publications. Always furnish complete references for any quotes either in footnotes or endnotes (providing full bibliographic details, as mentioned above).
- **Conclusion:** Close your essay by summarizing the salient points.


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- **Add to your essay one or two paragraphs summarizing how this course has (or has not) helped you in your understanding of Yoga and your inner growth. Please note that we are not fishing for compliments but genuinely want to understand your process of growth and the usefulness of our course!**

## 4. Questionnaires

This course comes with a total of **12 questionnaires of varying lengths** (given at the end of particular sections as part of the homework assignments). All questionnaires must be submitted for your tutor's feedback. When submitting, please **type your name and email address, course title, and date** at the top of your essay and all other communications to TYS.

## 5. Interacting with Your Tutor

**The principal function of your tutor is to assess your progress based on your responses to the submittable questionnaires and the concluding essay. As previously mentioned, your tutor will not be able to respond to questions in areas that are not covered by the course or to personal issues.**

If you have not heard back from your tutor within **three weeks**, please send a query by email.

If your essay is not up to standard, your tutor will advise you on reworking all or part of it. We want to facilitate your learning process but fully expect initiative on your part, as well as quality work.

**Please know that we are genuinely interested in your successful completion of the course.**

## 6. Certificate of Completion

On the successful completion of this distance learning course, TYS will issue a certificate. Before we can do so, you must meet **all** of the following criteria:

- **You have completed all 12 homework assignments**
- **You have submitted in a timely fashion and satisfactorily completed both the submittable questionnaires and the essay,** as well as any further materials requested by TYS to assess your competence.
- **Your study on this course has extended over a minimum period of 12**


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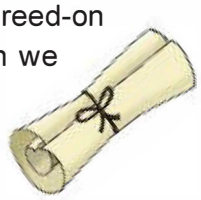
**months or a maximum period of 24 months (**including any agreed-on extension)**,** reckoned from the receipt of the course materials, which we assume would be roughly two weeks after they were shipped to you.



- **You have paid all fees** due on this course, including any extension fees.

When studying *The Yoga Tradition*, the detailed **index** in the book can serve you as a most valuable tool. Make good use of it while working on this course! It can be a great time-saver when trying to locate specific terms and concepts.

## IMPORTANT

When doing your homework assignments, always turn to *The Yoga Tradition* book together with this Study Guide.The book and the Study Guide are mutually illuminating! In other words, don't read first one and then the other!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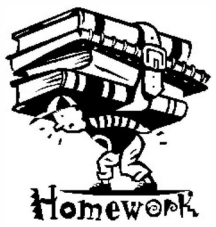
# LESSON 1

## I. Objectives

This opening lesson has the following two objectives:

- to highlight the importance of systematic dedicated study
- to explain the important difference between scholarly study and yogic study

## II. Homework Assignments




- **Listen** to the six CDs or equivalent audio downloads ("The Lost Teachings of Yoga") first.
- **Familiarize** yourself with the layout of *The Yoga Tradition* (YT) book. **Always use this book alongside your Study Guide!**
- **Read** the Preface in YT.
- **Familiarize** yourself with the layout of this Study Guide (SG), which follows closely that of *The Yoga Tradition* book.
- **Read** the Preface to this Study Guide, Practical Guidelines for Students, and Additional Study Materials #1 and #2 in SG.
- **Ponder** the questions under "For Reflection" and jot down your significant thoughts.
- **Answer Questionnaire #1 and submit.**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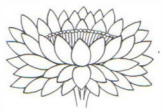
## III. Right Orientation

To make each of your study sessions into a properly centered and worthwhile yogic effort, you might want to consider using the traditional invocation to the right to set the stage.

The "teacher" for whom you are asking protection would be the collectivity of sages who created the wisdom teachings of Yoga. To be "nourished" means to be spiritually sustained by the subtle energies and subtle beings pervading the universe, or the invisible teachers protecting you. According to the tradition of Yoga, they exist, and their blessings are effective! Thus, you can proceed with great confidence. The fact is, you could never antagonize the masters. However, by pursuing your practice and study of Yoga half-heartedly, you might antagonize—stress or cheat yourself! This would be unnecessary and unfortunate.



**INVOCATION BEFORE TEACHINGS**
***to benefit both teacher and student***

*om saha nâv avatu, saha nau bhunaktu,*
*saha vîryam karavâvahai,*
*tejasvi nâv adhîtam astu, mâ vidvishâvahai.*
*om shântih, shântih, shântih.*

**"*Om*. May we both be protected.**
**May we both be nourished.**
**May we both vigorously work together.**
**May our study be energetic.**
**May we not antagonize one another.**
***Om*. Peace. Peace. Peace."**

**One way to empower your study of Yoga is to make an offering of it to the higher Reality.**

**Let's lack no discipline, make no delay: For, lords, tomorrow is a busy day.**

—William Shakespeare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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #1**

# Yoga Scholar vs. Yoga Practitioner

by Georg Feuerstein

Students of Yoga periodically raise the viable question: What is the relevance of scholarly research on Yoga? In particular, *The Yoga Tradition* is based on a great deal of scholarly research, and many of the materials found in this work require students to make a mental adjustment, because of the level of detailed and references involved.

Howard Kent, British Yoga teacher and author of several books

Many years ago, when I was still living in England, I invited a number of Yoga teachers to formulate their position regarding the theme "Yoga scholar vs. Yoga practitioner." I deliberately abstained from explaining what I meant, so as not to influence their consideration unduly. The following is a selection of responses received at the time.

Howard Kent (Yoga for Health Foundation, Ickwell Bury) made these comments: "I think research into Yoga is essential, providing it is on the right lines. The problem is a definition of 'research.' I feel the following is important:

- Discovery and examination of ancient texts, and their relationship to known extant texts, thus slowly piecing together a somewhat more definitive pattern of Yoga thought and development.
- Research into the 'subtle body' systems outlined in Yoga and their relationship to cosmic systems; the effect of this 'energy' on anatomy and physiology in the gross sense by which it is normally understood today.
- Research into altered states of consciousness. There are probably many other fields that I have omitted. All the above must, to my mind, be seen within the understanding that Yoga is not an intellectual pastime and must be regarded as a living intuition, never being hidebound by statements from the past, yet appreciating the amazing perception of many of such statements. I am less impressed by research in the more literally medical sense, i.e., how the *âsanas* operate and what they do. This research tends toward 'allopathic Yoga,' and we must resist any approach which limits the


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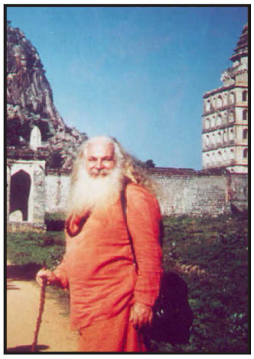
holistic basis of the subject."

Howard Kent's comments touch on at least two important issues. The first concerns the type or types of research that are to be considered "relevant." The second and related issue concerns the criteria for assessing which pieces of research are actually relevant or irrelevant. Here Kent adopts the view that Yoga is "not an intellectual pastime," but that it is to be taken in the sense in which it understands itself, namely as *praxis*. By further implication, if I understand his position correctly, research into Yoga is relevant only to the degree that it can and does inform or further such *praxis*. Kent, quite consequentially, is "less impressed" by certain aspects of medical research into Yoga, because he feels that they violate the (holistic) self-understanding of Yoga.

This shows most clearly that the problem of relevance is intimately bound up with the question of hermeneutics, that is, the channels of legitimate interpretation. If Yoga is a "holistic" science or art, does this necessarily mean that only "holistic" research approaches are relevant or even valid? May not a different perspective generate new knowledge? And should one *a priori* rule out the possibility that this new knowledge may be relevant, not only to Yoga practitioners but also to those who, as in the case of medical research, approach Yoga from the outside? Indeed, medical studies on Yoga have unearthed a variety of interesting facts about Yoga practices and, more importantly, about human nature. This newfound knowledge could well contribute to a new self-image for medicine, and it is the hope of many enlightened researchers that it should. Also, a thing may not be immediately relevant but have delayed or long-term implications. This possibly applies to textual studies and linguistic analyses, which are the proper province of the scholar, but which to the lay person must often seem abstruse, purely theoretical, and hence irrelevant. No doubt, other examples could be found.

But to come back to the problem of interpretation. Central to it is the question of whether Yoga can be understood by someone who stands outside the tradition, who has no personal experience of its various practices, and who does not subscribe to its belief system. Here all respondents were unanimous in their explicit or implicit rejection of the dichotomy indicated in the theme of our discussion. They could not envisage a Yoga scholar who had no commitment to Yoga practice whatsoever. Pauline Mainland (a Yoga teacher from the Nottingham area of England) put it as follows: "In my opinion the Yogi would be holding a conversation with himself, since I feel a Yoga researcher should also be a Yoga practitioner and vice versa."



Swami Gitananda
(1907–1993)

The late Dr. Swami Gitananda, who founded the Ananda Ashram in Pondicherry, independently criticized the "arm chair Yoga" of certain researchers. Yet, is the situation really so clear-cut? I have long pleaded for the adoption of personal experimentation (i.e., practice) as a valid means of obtaining knowledge about Yoga. However, in doing so I have expressed a desideratum rather than a categorical imperative. By no means do all scholars interested in the study of Yoga also experiment with, or avow the goals and values of, Yoga. Certainly among the pioneers of Yoga research, those who actually practiced Yoga were the rare exception rather than the rule. But we cannot honestly discard all their scholarly efforts as completely worthless, even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though the lack of a personal encounter with Yoga has undeniably led to misunderstandings and distortions.

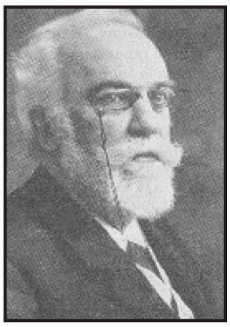
In any case, not all the shortcomings noticed in the scholarly literature on Yoga can be said to derive from the absence of experiential knowledge of Yoga. If a personal commitment to, and a subjective knowledge of, Yoga were infallible guides to hermeneutic perfection, one would expect far fewer misinterpretations on the part of those who are, or claim to be, professional *yogins*. Proximity to a given tradition can cause myopia in much the same way that remoteness can give rise to hypermetropia, which may blind one to important details.

Paul Deussen

The early Western researchers who dealt with Yoga—like Henry Thomas Colebrooke, Paul Deussen, Max Müller, Richard Garbe, Hermann Jacobi, E. Washburn Hopkins, Hermann Oldenberg, Franklin Edgerton, Richard Rösel, Sigurd Lindquist, and Johann W. Hauer—were subject to certain Eurocentric biases. Because of the influence of European thought during the British Raj, even Indian scholars succumbed to similar intellectual constraints. Happily, in recent years, the study of Yoga has become somewhat less encumbered by ideological prejudices, though personal experimentation with Yoga is still looked upon as eccentric in academic circles. It appears, however, that today a number of Yoga scholars are also Yoga practitioners, which is encouraging. At the same time, however, this poses the problem of objectivity.

Max Müller

To put it in familiar terms: Can a committed Christian be a good theologian, or can he or she merely be a good apologist? Conversely, can an agnostic scientist ever really comprehend the position of a traditionalist, be he or she a Christian or a Yoga practitioner? Can an anthropologist really understand another society or culture without "going native," and how reliable would her anthropological report be if she did effectively overcome the natural barrier between her own culture and the host culture? There are those who maintain that only total commitment to a particular belief system can yield full understanding of it. This is connected with the notion that truth is relative to a given conceptual system and that therefore objectivity is something of a myth. Although this philosophical relativism is popular in certain quarters, it is difficult to endorse because of the obvious absurdities to which it leads. Perhaps, as is so often the case, the truth lies midway between conceptual relativism and dogmatic objectivism: We share the same world but interpret and therefore experience it differently. Unless this is granted, no communication between one conceptual system and another would be feasible. This is not the place, however, for a more



Richard Garbe

J. W. Hauer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detailed discussion of hermeneutical issues.

Big Ben, London

Judging from the existing scholarly literature on Yoga, there no insurmountable "intelligibility gap" between the *yogin* and the Yoga researcher. Understanding and commitment are not linked by an unshakable causal nexus. To what degree commitment can influence (or inspire) understanding is ultimately an empirical question, which should be answered not on the platform of philosophy but on the level of empirical facts. At any rate, it is far more likely that personal involvement in Yoga, rather than providing a genuine handicap in the "objective" interpretation of this tradition, will widen scholars' horizon of knowledge and sensitize them to their own preconceptions and prejudices.

James McCartney, author of several widely read books on Yoga, contributed the following to-the-point observations: "Who will make use of research? No doubt it will enhance the career of the researcher, and may provide an income through the resulting books, articles, and lectures. It will provide the scholar with a deeper knowledge and wider horizons. But what of the practitioner? . . . To the qualified teacher I see research as a great help and encouragement, and I know of some who go to great lengths to keep up to date in an effort to extend their knowledge and skill, but in my experience, sadly, these are a minority. One valuable service already rendered by research into Yoga is the publication of data relating to phenomena encountered in the practice of Yoga. This has taken Yoga out of the field of 'occult mystery' or 'a pastime for cranks' or 'Eastern trickery.' Instead Yoga is fast becoming accepted as a true science of life in its fullest extent, bestowing incalculable benefits upon its practitioners, but its importance lies also in the field of general philosophy."

Although one may not wish to endorse McCartney's statement that "Yoga is fast becoming accepted as a true science of life," his concluding remark about its importance for general philosophy is very perceptive, if by "general philosophy" he means philosophy as applicable to life in general. But even if the term were intended to refer, more narrowly, to philosophy in the older sense of *studium generale*, one could not find fault with the above observation. Yoga philosophy puts forward unusual concepts and philosophical solutions that, by their sheer "outlandishness" impel one to critically examine the fixed circumference of one's own theoretical position and simultaneously challenge one to explore new ways of thinking about the perennial problems of human existence. So much for the question of the possible relevance of Yoga research.

A no less important issue is the whole question of the communication of scientific knowledge about Yoga to those who have a preeminently practical interest in the subject. As Wilfred Clark, one of the founders of the British Yoga movement, put it in his customary inimitable style: "I do advocate that so far as is humanly possible, the results of such research be widely published in basic English as it is vitally important to get down to the lowest common denominator in reader intelligence. Academic language can only put such people 'off.' As the late Horatio Bottomley is reported to have declared:


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"I'm a bloke what calls a spade a spade, if necessary a bloody shovel."

The same point was made by Vincent Rylance (of the Yoga Society International, Rochdale): "It becomes daily more clear to me that the great majority of people need simple, clear explanations that can be applied to everyday life. Perhaps scholars do not fully realize this. Certainly, I know that a lot of teachers talk right over the heads of the students, from comments passed back to me at seminars all over the country. After all, teaching is the ability to communicate knowledge, and if that fails by lack of ability to bring that knowledge down to the level of the student, the teaching is in vain. Perhaps too the scholar tends to be carried away by the use of terms that are obscure except to other scholars, and thus to read his work becomes a study of some intensity resulting in tiredness through difficulties in understanding his meaning. The average student will not bother to do this, of course, when it is possible to reach the same understanding from sources that are more clearly written in basic English, etc. This is not so much a criticism as a statement of experience, and a report on feedback received. The practitioner too needs the research carried out by the scholar in order that he can practice his Yoga more intensively and more fully understand all the bases on which he works. However, somewhere along the line somebody needs to get down to bringing all of this to an average level of intelligence."

These are essentially valid points. The communication gap between the specialist and the layperson is as undeniable as it is considerable. While the layperson is frustrated by the unintelligible, "esoteric" outpourings of the scholar, the specialist, in turn, is as a rule horrified at the prospect of "vulgarizing" his or her knowledge through the kind of oversimplification that is necessary to bridge the communication gap. There may still occasionally be vestiges of the aura of priestly superiority of earlier days present in this, but on the whole most specialists are probably genuinely worried that by translating their knowledge into basic English (or whatever language) they will have to make compromises that seem unjustifiable to them. Then, again, not every chemist, mathematician, philosopher, or Indologist is a good stylist, and it is no secret that many quite brilliant minds find it virtually impossible to write intelligibly.

There is also the understandable, if unfortunate, tendency of producing knowledge for one's in-group (in this case the scientific

### Translating Sanskrit

Along with English, French, German, Greek, and Latin, Sanskrit belongs to the family of Indo-European languages. More specifically, it belongs to the Indo-Iranian branch of Indo-European. Once we have overcome the hurdle of the *devanâgarî* script, this gives Sanskrit a familiar feel to Western students. Yet, it definitely has its peculiarities and complexities, which make it a challenging language to learn. Very few Westerners can be said to have mastered Sanskrit with its nearly 4,000 grammatical rules.

Yoga texts represent an additional difficulty, because their subject matter tends to be recondite. Especially the *Vedas* (composed in archaic Sanskrit, called *arsha*) and Tantric texts are replete with symbolism, which is very difficult to understand even when one has been initiated into the yogic tradition.

To this challenge we must add the further difficulty that many Sanskrit concepts simply have no precise equivalent in other languages, because these concepts derive from intensive yogic experience.


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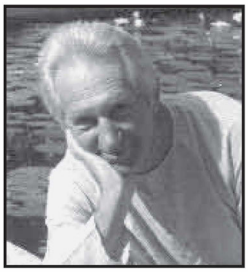
or scholarly community in which one participates) rather than for the "out-sider" (who may even be a researcher in a different field). Some disciplines, however, clearly benefit from an enduring public interest: history, politics, economics, and also Indology (or the study of Indic culture, including the Yoga tradition). It was scholars like Sir Charles Wilkins (the first English translator of the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*), Paul Deussen (translator of sixty *Upanishads* into German) and Max Müller (editor and translator of the *Rig-Veda* and the major *Upanishads*), to name but a few, who not only stimulated the initial public interest in India's thought and Yoga, but who did much to legitimize the study of Yoga within the halls of academia. Indologists have clearly played an important role in the original dissemination of Indic ideas, particularly Yoga, in the West. They actually prepared the soil for the missionary activities of such incredibly successful luminaries of Yoga as Swami Vivekananda, Paramahansa Yogananda, and other early ambassadors of Hinduism.

In recent years, more and more specialists have become willing to address the non-specialist Yoga-practicing public, especially in the field of Buddhist Yoga. Not all their attempts at *haute vulgarisation* meet with success. It requires a great deal of empathy to convert scholarly interests into primarily practical interests and into a reduced vocabulary. The real problem here lies in making an accurate appraisal of what the lay reader is likely to understand and what not. Very often specialists tend to overtax their audience, and the lay person may be excused for thinking that the problem is simply one of jargon. No doubt, it would be quite possible to translate most scholarly concepts into ordinary language (in a round-about sort of way), but this would not necessarily simplify the often rather complex matters that these concepts represent.

Obviously, communication ("popularization") can take place at various levels, and the argument that one should always find the lowest common denominator is not convincing because this can lead to quite impractical consequences. The specialist who is willing to make such a sacrifice either has to severely crop his or her argumentation or write in a totally ineffectual circumlocutory style. But the problem of language—serious as it is—is only one aspect of the issue at stake. Equally, if not more, important is the question of the relevance of the communication. In other words, it is not only the form that matters but also the content. Here, most specialists are guilty of inadequate empathy. They naturally find it extraordinarily

## Philosophy in a New Key

Henryk Skolimowski



"Our times call for a new holistic philosophy, integrative par excellence and not shy of spirituality; capable of addressing far-reaching cosmological problems concerning the origin of the universe and existential problems concerning the destiny of mankind—all in the same framework . . . Philosophy is very important. It gives a structure of support to your life . . . Philosophy is a quest of liberation. All philosophies seek to elevate man, release him from bondage, bring him closer to Nirvana, to heaven, to the inner god . . . The time has come to realize that the Eastern spiritual traditions are part of our tradition."

—*The Participatory Mind* (London: Arkana, 1994), pp. 354-55, 378-79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difficult to comprehend the life world of the "average" Yoga practitioner, who may neither be able to follow a longer philosophical argument nor even be interested in such a flight into the realm of pure ideas. The practitioner may, for instance, be quite content in the knowledge that Yoga philosophy admits of a transcendental Reality that can in some way be realized but may regard any discussion of the metaphysical implications of this concept as entirely superfluous. Obviously, specialists must not expect each and every Yoga practitioner to enthuse about their scholarly predilections or personal preferences. If researchers happen to be Yoga practitioners, then we would expect them to possess a modicum of understanding and tolerance, and to have a compassionate interest in serving others through their communication.

To summarize, the dialectic between Yoga practitioners and researchers can and should be developed. Yoga teachers could clearly play an instrumental role in this process because they work with practitioners and are practitioners themselves and therefore know what is useful. If they are good teachers and practitioners, they also will make an effort to continually study the tradition to which they belong. This means they will work with the Yoga scriptures and the secondary literature. Thus they occupy the dual world of Yoga theory and practice. Their practical experience will be invaluable to researchers dealing with Yoga at a scholarly or scientific level. In turn, scholarship that is more sensitive to present-day concerns with Yoga can help broaden practitioners' intellectual horizon and deepen their understanding of the yogic tradition in its diverse forms. Both practitioners and researchers would benefit from such cooperation.

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #2**

## In Praise of Study (Svâdhyâya)

by Georg Feuerstein

Socrates,
a Western *yogin*

Knowledge is power. But is it? Personally, I think this popular maxim is grossly misleading. Nevertheless, knowledge that leads to self-understanding is invaluable, because it is self-understanding that empowers us to live a life that is not dictated by the mechanism of our unconscious. And this is what Yoga and all other spiritual traditions are ultimately about.

Hence in the Yoga tradition *study* is considered an important means of self-knowledge. The Sanskrit word for study is *svâdhyâya*, which means literally


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"one's own (*sva*) going into (*adhyâya*)." It stands for the serious and systematic study of the Yoga tradition as well as oneself. Both knowledge of the tradition and self-knowledge go hand in hand. The traditional scriptures contain the distilled wisdom of sages who have climbed to the pinnacle of self-knowledge, and therefore these texts can contribute to our own self-knowledge. Study, in the yogic sense, is always a journey of self-discovery, self-understanding, and self-transcendence. Since ancient times, it has been a regular component of the yogic path. Patanjali, in his *Yoga-Sûtra* (2.32), lists it as one of the constituent practices of self-restraint (*niyama*), the second "limb" of his eightfold path.

Since study is a valid yogic practice, it makes sense to pursue it with the same dedication and rigor that we should invest in the cultivation of postures and meditation.

Study is an integral part of Yoga's pragmatic orientation. Yoga does not call for blind faith, though it stresses the superlative importance of real, deep faith (*shraddhâ*), or trust. Mere belief cannot help us realize that which abides beyond the conditional or egoic personality. Instead, Yoga has always been intensely experimental and experiential, and study is one aspect of this sound approach. In the *Vishnu-Purâna* (6.6.2), an old encyclopedic Sanskrit work, we read:

> From study one should proceed to practice (*yoga*), and from practice to study.
> The supreme Self is revealed through perfection in study and practice.

It is better to learn late than never.

**—Shakespeare**

Many Western Yoga practitioners, especially those with a dominant right brain, shy away from study. They would much rather polish their performance of one or the other posture. Yet, it would seem they often miss the mark, because they do not know the proper context in which these techniques must be cultivated. Often they do not even have an accurate knowledge of the techniques themselves. They sometimes seek to compensate for their lack of knowledge by trying to reinvent the wheel and produce their own versions of yogic practices. While innovation is commendable—our whole civilizational adventure is based on it—in the case of Yoga, we would do well to be modest; after all, the Yoga tradition can look back upon at least 5,000 years of intense experimentation.

Just as a predominantly right-brained (action-driven) approach to Yoga has its pitfalls, a purely left-brained (thought-driven) approach is equally precarious, if not altogether futile. "Armchair Yoga" cannot replace actual experience. If our practice is merely nominal, so will be our attainments. In Yoga, both theory and practice form a continuum, like space-time. It requires from us a full engagement, as the Buddhists put it: with body, speech, and mind. Yoga, as the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (2.48) reminds us, is balance (*samatva*). Hence we ought to engage both cerebral hemispheres when applying ourselves to the yogic path. Let us also recall here that one of the meanings of the word *yoga* is "integration."


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An ancient scripture, the *Shata-Patha-Brâhmana* (11.5.7.1), declares that, for serious students, study is a source of joy. It focuses the student's mind and lets him or her sleep peacefully. It also yields insight and the capacity to master life. What more could one ask for?

## FOR REFLECTION

1. How do you relate to knowledge? Do you collect information like some people collect knicknacks? Do you regard knowledge as an avenue to wisdom? Or do you consider wisdom something radically different from knowledge?

2. What knowledge has had the most transformative effect on you and how did it shape you?

3. Do you think there is such a thing as "objective" knowledge? Can we ever step out of our skin to know things as they really are?

4. Alexander Pope wrote that the proper object of study should be humankind itself. What would be your response to him?

5. What is the difference between knowledge and information? People speak of "information overload" and the "knowledge explosion." How do you relate to both?

6. When we say "I know," we sometimes really mean "I assume." Consider some of your basic "knowledges" and determine whether you truly know or are merely making assumptions. Where, in your case, is the dividing line between knowledge and faith?

7. What role do you assign to knowledge in religio-spiritual matters? Is it all right to take things on faith, or should we always gain absolute certainty?

8. Many, if not most, Western Yoga practitioners have very little interest in studying Yoga, feeling that it is more important to practice. Do you believe it is possible to practice Yoga authentically without also studying it?

9. Studying Yoga will certainly give us valuable information, but do you feel that it also can inspire, uplift, and motivate us? What are your reasons for studying?

10. Do you tend to think you "don't know anything"? Or do you take pride in your knowledge? Do you think knowledge is power?


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# QUESTIONNAIRE #1

Please SUBMIT this questionnaire to TYS: tyslearning@sasktel.net
Don't forget to include your full name, email address, date, and course title. Please refer to our instructions on p. 17.

**1. Why is study so important?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) to obtain a TYS certificate
(b) to be able to practice traditional Yoga authentically
(c) to impress one's students with one's knowledge
(d) to be able to pass on yogic knowledge correctly
(e) to appreciate Yoga for the right reasons

**2. Is a practical encounter with yogic teachings essential to understanding them?** *(Check one)*

(a) yes
(b) not at all
(c) not in all respects

We study to understand.
We understand to change.
We change to grow.
We grow to transcend.
We transcend to become free.

—Georg Feuerstein

**3. When can one's study of Yoga be considered authentic?** *(Check one)*

(a) when one follows the findings and conclusions of Yoga scholars
(b) when one takes into account only the knowledge as found in the Yoga texts
(c) when one relies only on one's personal experiences
(d) when one combines proper yogic practice with careful examination of the Yoga heritage, whether transmitted through a living teacher or through the wisdom found in yogic texts
(e) when one studies intensively and with the help of numerous authoritative books and articles


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**4. Which Yoga text, among others, recommends to combine study with practice?** *(Check one)*

(a) *Yoga-Sûtra* of Patanjali
(b) *Vishnu-Purâna*
(c) *Yoga-Bhâshya* of Vyâsa
(d) *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*

**5. Are Yoga and science incompatible?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) Yoga is subjectivist while science is objectivist
(b) Yoga and science are completely incompatible
(c) Yoga and science are not incompatible
(d) Yoga and science are complementary
(e) Yoga and science both need to compromise to be compatible
(f) Yoga is based on traditional dogmas while science is based on pure research
(g) Yoga and science have different purposes but are conducted in a rational and empiritual manner and are compatible on that count

**6. Who said "Philosophy is a quest of liberation"?** *(Check one)*

(a) Patanjali
(b) Skolimowski
(c) Socrates
(d) Vyasa
(e) Swami Gitananda

## REMEMBER

As we noted in the Practical Guidelines, we recommend that you write your responses to "For Reflection" and also to the Homework questions in your notebook. Many students have found this very helpful in assimilating yogic ideas and making them relevant to their daily life and spiritual practice.


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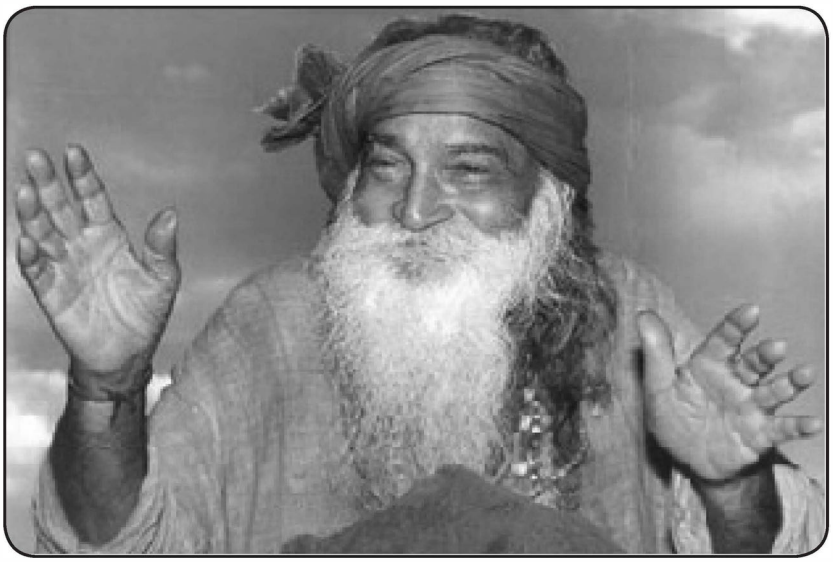

Yogi Ramsuratkumar

Yogi Ramsuratkumar (1918–2001), who called himself a “beggar,” was one of modern India’s renowned and much-loved saints.


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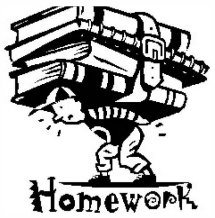
# LESSON 2

## I. Objectives

This lesson has the following three objectives:

- to help you familiarize yourself with the philosophical notions of transcendence and reality
- to explain the difference between external technology and inner technology (or psycho-technology)
- to introduce Yoga symbolism

## II. Homework Assignments




- **Read** the Introduction in *The Yoga Tradition* book (pp. xxv–xxx)
- **Read** all related sections in Lesson 2 of this Study Guide, including Additional Study Materials #3–6.
- **Ponder** the questions under "For Reflection" and jot down your significant thoughts.
- **Answer Questionnaire #2 and submit.**
- **Practical Assignment:** For one full day carefully observe your reactions to people and circumstances. Become familiar with your positive and negative thought patterns. At the end of the day, make a list of your various observations. Could you have done better? If so, resolve to improve your attitudes the next day. Every day is a new beginning, and there is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no need to indulge in feelings of frustration or guilt. If you did not observe the slightest negative reaction, you are either a saint or you did not look closely enough! This kind of self-observation is an integral aspect of the yogic path.

## III. Introductory Remarks

With Lesson 2, you are coming to the crux of all Yoga: the noble gesture of self-transcendence, which takes you beyond the ego contraction into the wide open space of spiritual reality. As you progress on the path, this gesture will become less and less effortful and more and more natural. As long as the discipline of self-transcendence is absent from your practice, you are not yet practicing Yoga. For Yoga to be Yoga, the gesture of self-transcendence must be present.

Self-transcendence isn't necessarily the same as entering into some higher state of consciousness. It is nothing extraordinary other than in the sense that it is different from our usual habit of referring everything to ourselves, of making our ego the center of our little universe.

By contrast, self-transcendence is a discipline by which we consciously, deliberately attempt to neutralize the ego and respond to what is in front of us without looking through the narrow lens of the ego. It is the mindful gesture of going beyond our largely unconscious tendency to identify with our body-mind in an exclusive kind of way. Instead, we see the interconnected of everything and that our ego is something of an artificial device by which we separate ourselves from the rest of reality.

May your self-transcending practice thrive!

### REMEMBER

As we noted before, we recommend that you write your responses to "For Reflection" and also to the Homework questions in your notebook. Many students have found this very helpful in assimilating yogic ideas and making them relevant to their daily life and spiritual practice.


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# Introduction: The Impulse toward Transcendence

**(YT, pp. xxv-xxx)**

Always read the relevant section in *The Yoga Tradition* book first, then read our summary of the main points of that section and further elucidating materials.

## I. Reaching Beyond the Ego Personality

### Main Points

**1.** The impulse toward transcendence is innate and universal.

**2.** This impulse has urged seekers to contemplate the Reality beyond the phenomenal world. The following three characteristics of this ultimate Reality are almost universally recognized:

- It is an undivided Whole, singular and complete.
- It is of a higher degree of reality than our ordinary perception of the physical realm.
- It is the highest good (*nihshreyasa*) to be realized.

**3.** Realization of the Absolute is the forté of India's great spiritual traditions. In the quest for ultimate freedom, India's sages and pundits have explored the scope of human experience and articulated profound and diverse answers. Thus, the spiritual heritage of India provides us with vast psychological and spiritual models of existence.


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4. Yoga, in the broad sense of the term, denotes all of the practices and theories of India's spirituality. The purpose of Yoga is to bring about freedom from suffering, or spiritual liberation (*moksha*).

5. We are *essentially* free. We realize this when we transcend our limited notion of self or ego (*ahamkâra*).

6. Not only do we as individuals have the potential for realizing our innate freedom, the cosmos itself appears to have a tendency to move toward the Real. Evolution seems to be programmed not only for veiling the Truth from us but also for transcendence of our limited human condition. Aurobindo Ghose, the founder of Integral Yoga, distinguished himself from other great mystics by incorporating modern evolutionary concepts into his metaphysics.

7. Art, philosophy, theology, science, and technology can all be understood as expressions of humanity's innate impulse to transcendence. These pursuits characterize the human search for and expression of wholeness, happiness, and understanding.

## Ego-Transcendence

When the soul itself grows quiet, and rests from its own weariness; when the witness releases its final hold, and dissolves into its ever-present ground; when the last layer of the Self is peeled into the purest emptiness; when the final form of the self-contraction unfolds in the infinity of all space; then Spirit itself, as ever-present awareness, stands free of its own accord, never really lost, and therefore never really found. With a shock of the utterly obvious, the world continues to arise, just as it always has . . . In ever-present awareness, your soul expands to embrace the entire Kosmos, so that Spirit alone remains, as the simple world of what is. The rain no longer falls on you, but within you; the sun shines from inside your heart and radiates out into the world, blessing it with grace; supernovas swirl in your consciousness, the thunder is the sound of your own exhilarated heart; the oceans and rivers are nothing but your blood pulsing to the rhythm of your soul. Infinitely ascended worlds of light dance in the interior of your brain; infinitely descended worlds of night cascade around your feet; the clouds crawl across the sky of your own unfettered mind, while the wind blows through the empty space where your self once used to be. The sound of the rain falling on the roof is the only self you can find, here in the obvious world of crystalline one taste, where inner and outer are silly fictions and self and other are obscene lies, and ever-present simplicity is the sound of one hand clapping madly for all eternity. In the greatest depth, the simplest what is, and the journey ends, as it always does, exactly where it began.

—**Ken Wilber,** *Integral Psychology* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), p. 108


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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #3**

# The Yoga of Science

by Georg Feuerstein

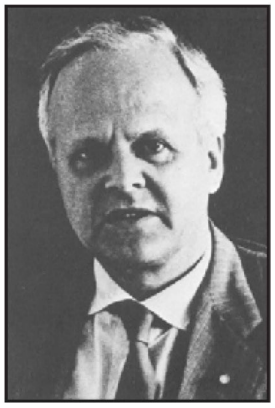

Photo by Stefan Moses

C. F. von Weizsäcker

The goal of science, observed Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, is not to transform the world; rather the primary motivation is the quest for truth.[1] And yet, in my view, this quest remains incomplete without its translation into the realm of practical life. If not the world, science—i.e., the knowledge gained from science—surely must transform the scientist. Knowledge in the abstract is merely a titillation of the intellect, an inconsequential stimulation of a segment of our total humanness.

> To fulfill itself, knowledge must find expression in the body. More than that, it must transmute the body by the power of its truth. And it is truth, not knowledge, which is replete with power. The power associated with knowledge is manipulative power, such as political leverage or overpowering influence. The power inherent in truth, however, is transformative in the deepest sense. It is capable of remaking the person in the light of truth.

What truth? Or should we be speaking of truths? To hold true, truth must be singular. Always. A multiplicity of truths is a contradiction in terms. The custom of speaking of many truths arose out of the loss of truth and its substitution by countless facts. But facts are not truth. Only wisdom (*prajnâ*) is truth-bearing (*ritambhara*) and therefore liberating. Truth is Reality without conceptual blinders.

To the degree that the path of science is illumined by the ideal of truth, it has the capacity of guiding the scientist, step by step, to the discovery of truth—not merely factual truth but the kind of truth that sees everything in context and also preserves that context. A consideration of the larger context of human life must include reference to humanity's evolutionary potential, including its possible spiritual destiny. Thus science can serve as a stepping stone to the "evolutionary science" of Yoga, that is, to spiritual discipline through which our full potential is revealed. Yoga's techniques of concentration and meditation, if mastered, disclose the transcendental possibilities of the mind, which allow us to experience truth at the highest level, as "ultimate Truth."

1. C. F. von Weizsäcker, *Unity of Nature* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1980), p. 13.


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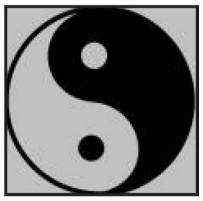
# II. Technologies of East and West
## (YT, pp. xviii-xix)

The whole trend of modern civilisation is towards external freedom. Free expression of opinion, free association, freedom to establish one's personal relationships on one's own initiative, and freedom to pursue a vocation according to one's merits are essentially needed for making life fruitful and happy. But external freedom, in the last analysis, is ego-centric, and should not miss its spiritual counterpart in internal freedom. Inner freedom consists in the conquest of lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and sloth. A happy blending of reason and love can alone bring about this freedom and give meaning to all forms of external freedom.

**—Swami Avyaktananda**
*Letters to a Truth-Seeker* (London: The Vedanta Movement, 1943), pp. 9-10

## Main Points



1. Our modern technology is an outgrowth of humanity's impulse toward self-transcendence. But modern science and technology pertain only to the domain of *relative* liberty and happiness.
2. The psychospiritual technology of the East (i.e., Yoga) directly aims at self-transcendence and inner development. The answers to our fundamental human concerns require wisdom as well as the practical knowledge of modern science and technology. Wisdom is the strength of the great Yogas of India.
3. The two traditions, the technology of the East and the scientific materialism of the West, are complementary when we recognize their value in relation to their respective domains of application.

To preserve the silence within—amid all the noise. To remain open and quiet, a moist humus in the fertile darknes where the rain falls and the grain ripens—no matter how many tramp across the parade-ground in whirling dust under an arid sky.

—Dag Hammarskjold, *Markings,* p. 85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# III. Reality and Models of Reality
## (YT, pp. xviii-xix)

## Main Points

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804 A.D.), one of the world's most influential philosophers, who preoccupied himself with answering the key question of epistemology: "What can we know?"

**1.** The ultimate Reality is beyond all conceptualization. Thus *models* are created by adepts to express their spiritual realizations to others. This is a very important point: All teachings are not the Truth itself but merely *articulations* of it. We must see them as models that can help us orient ourselves in our endeavor to understand life more deeply.

**2.** It is possible to experience things directly, without the mediation of the senses, through the ecstatic state (*samâdhi*).

**3.** Epistemology is the theory of knowledge or of the valid means of cognition. The various philosophical systems of India recognize one or more such means. The materialist schools—the Cârvakas—only permit sense perception.

**4.** Many schools of Indian thought recognize the following three instruments of valid knowledge (*pramâna*):

- sense perception (*pratyaksha*)
- inference (*anumâna*)
- revealed knowledge (*shabda*)

Each school places its own distinct emphasis on some of these instruments. *Shabda*—or *âpta-vâcana*—is the testimony of adepts who, through their direct realization of the ultimate Reality, are able to bear witness to it. Therefore it is often considered to be the most authoritative source of spiritual knowledge. Inference refers to the process of making a valid logical connection between one thing and another. Perception is the familiar process of seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, or smelling.

Make sure you study this section in the Introduction of *The Yoga Tradition* first.

**5.** Ontology, the theory of being, deals with the general categories of existence. Ontology is prominently treated in most schools of Yoga, which often rely on the model furnished by the Sâmkhya tradition with its twenty-four categories, or *tattvas* (see YT, p. 76), the twenty-fifth being the Spirit (*purusha*).


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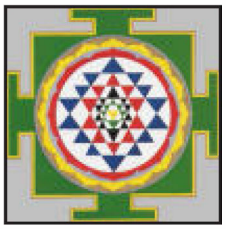

6. The kind of worldview that emphasizes a "Reality" above and beyond the world of senses and mind can be called *verticalism*. A verticalist or "ascending" trend has pervaded much of Indian Yoga. This has often led, as in the case of Classical Yoga, to a simultaneous withdrawal from the so-called "lower" reality of the material world. The verticalist orientation is simplified in the statement "in, up, and out" (internalization, ascension, and withdrawal/transcendence).
7. The philosophical models of Tantra offer an alternative to the ascending/verticalist model. Tantra sees an integral relation between Nature and Spirit and aims to achieve wholeness through integrating all dimensions from the coarse physical realm to the deep core of Being, Spirit. The philosophical underpinnings of Tantra are discussed in Chapter 17 of *The Yoga Tradition* and are treated in greater detail in a separate distance-learning course.
8. Much of the world's mystical/spiritual literature is ripe with symbolism. For a brief introduction to the symbolism and symbolic language found in the literature of Yoga, see the following essay.

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #4**

## Yoga Symbolism

by Georg Feuerstein

Yoga is steeped in symbolism. Some symbols are shared between the great yogic traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism; others are unique to each. For Western students, this represents a particular challenge, as the meaning of the yogic symbols is seldom obvious. Basically, we can distinguish two kinds of symbolism: a spontaneous, "natural" symbolism and an artificial symbolism. Both arise from the higher mind (*buddhi*), which is the preferred mental organ of the Yoga adepts. The lower mind (*manas*) is logical and literal; the higher mind is translogical and metaphoric. The *buddhi* is an impersonal agency, which functions as the organ of wisdom and also acts as the depository of the deep symbols or archetypes. It has much in common with the concept of the universal unconscious in Jungian psychology. Unlike English, the German language makes a useful distinction between *Vernunft* and *Verstand,* which fairly accurately correspond to *buddhi* and *manas* respectively. The former is the fertile ground in which ground in which creativity, poetry, and symbolism flourish.

Natural symbolism is basic to all good poetry. When the poet calls Nature a "bloody tooth," we have an instance of natural symbolism. An example of artificial symbolism is the secret code of


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the *Tantras,* known as *sandhyâ-bhâshya* or "twilight language," which is a construct of the logical mind under the inspiration of the *buddhi*.

The earliest manifestations of spontaneous symbolism can be seen in the poetry of the *Rig-Veda,* though this archaic work also contains numerous examples of artificial symbolism. Sometimes the two forms of symbolism are used conjointly; sometimes no clear distinction can be made. It took a great Yoga master—Sri Aurobindo—to draw our attention to the fact that the *Vedas* are laden with profound symbols, most of which have escaped the notice of scholars or been misunderstood by them. In his book *On the Veda,* he writes:

> The [Rig-]Veda is a book of esoteric symbols, almost of spiritual formulae, which masks itself as a collection of ritual poems. The inner sense is psychological, universal, impersonal; the ostensible significance and the figures, which were meant to reveal to the initiates what they concealed from the ignorant, are to all appearance crudely concrete, intimately personal, loosely occasional and allusive. To this lax outer garb the Vedic poets are sometimes careful to give a clear and coherent form quite other than the strenuous inner soul of their meaning; their language then becomes a cunningly woven mask for hidden truths. More often they are negligent of the disguise which they use, and when they thus rise above their instrument, a literal and external translation gives either a bizarre, unconnected sequence of sentences or a form of thought and speech strange and remote to the uninitiated intelligence.

(ctd.)

## SYMBOLISM

The word "symbol" comes from Greek *symballein*, meaning "to throw together." What is "thrown together" in a symbol is the signifying sign or word and the signified object. The difference between a symbol and a sign is that the former does not have a 1:1 relationship with that which is symbolized. Unlike signs, whose meaning is fixed, symbols are charged with meaning that calls for interpretation based on contextual sensitivity and intuition—that is, participation of the deeper layers of the human mind. For example, we all understand that the Greek letter $\Pi$ (pi) signifies the numeric value 3.1415. . .

Not everyone, however, understands what the ancient OM symbol stands for and what it entails intellectually and emotionally for Hindus, Buddhists, and Jaina practitioners of the yogic teachings.


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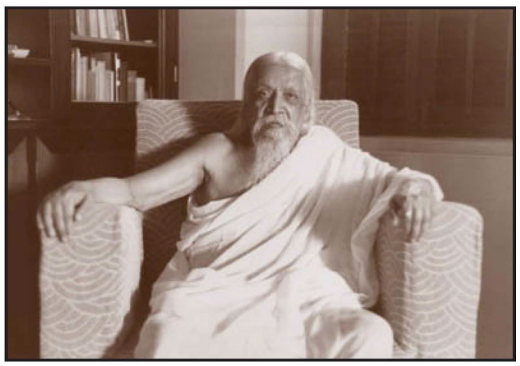
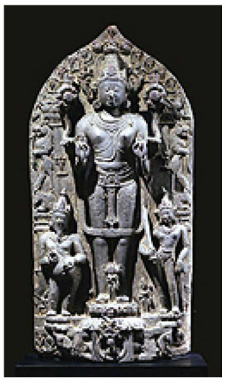


Sri Aurobindo

> It is only when the figures and symbols are made to suggest their concealed equivalents that there emerges out of the obscurity a transparent and well-linked though close and subtle sequence of spiritual, psychological and religious ideas.[1]

Aurobindo's orientation has yielded important new insights into the thought of the Vedic seers (*rishi*), who "saw" the truth. He showed a way out of the uninspiring scholarly perspective, with its insistence that the Vedic seers were "primitive" poets obsessed with natural phenomena like thunder, lightning, and rain. The one-dimensional "naturalistic" interpretations proffered by other translators missed out on the depth of the Vedic teachings.



Sûrya

Thus Sûrya is not only the visible material Sun but also the psychological-spiritual principle of inner luminosity. Agni is not merely the physical fire that consumes the sacrificial offerings but the spiritual principle of purifying transformation. Parjanya does not only stand for rain but also the inner "irrigation" of grace. Soma is not merely the concoction the sacrificial priests poured into the fire but also (as in the later Tantric tradition) the magical inner substance that transmutes the body and the mind. The wealth prayed for in many hymns is not just material prosperity but spiritual riches. The cows mentioned over and over again in the hymns are not so much the biological animals but spiritual light. The Panis are not just human merchants but various forces of darkness. When Indra slew Vritra and released the floods, he not merely inaugurated the monsoon season but also unleashed the powers of life (or higher energies) within the psyche of the priest, for Indra also stands for the mind and Vritra for psychological restriction, or energetic blockage.

Aurobindo contributed in a major way to a thorough reappraisal of the meaning of the Vedic hymns, and his work encouraged a number of scholars to follow suit, including Jeanine Miller and David Frawley.[2]

There is also plenty of deliberate, artificial symbolism in the hymns. In fact, the figurative language of the *Rig-Veda* is extraordinarily rich, as Willard Johnson has demonstrated.[3] In special sacrificial symposia, the hymn composers met to share their poetic creations and stimulate each other's creativity and comprehension of the subtle realities of life. Thus many hymns are deliberately enigmatic, and often we can only guess at the solutions to their enigmas and allegorical riddles. Heinrich Zimmer reminded us:

> The myths and symbols of India resist intellectualization and reduction to fixed significations. Such treatments would only sterilize them of their magic.[4]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As Sadashiv Ambadas Dange has shown, sexual symbolism is very extensively used in the *Rig-Veda* and subsequently was greatly elaborated in the *Brâhmanas* (ritual texts).[5] In the *Rig-Veda,* for instance, the concept of *mithuna* ("coupling, "copulating") is applied to the symbolic coupling of Heaven and Earth, water and fire, the two Ashvins, day and night, etc. The Vedic sexual symbolism clearly foreshadows the Tantric heritage of medieval India.

The famous hymn of Dîrghatamas ("Long Night") in the *Rig-Veda* (1.164) mentions in verse 35 that the *soma* libation is the semen of the virile stallion (i.e. Heaven); the womb belongs to Mother Earth. She gives birth to the solar year, or the sacrifice, or the sacrificial fire. Verse 16 of the same hymn mentions that the months of the year are said to be male, but the seer knows them to be female (i.e., receptive). Without the key to the symbolic language of the four *Vedas,* the extensive ritual literature of the *Brâhmanas* and *Âranyakas* remains largely incomprehensible.

We see a new kind of symbolism emerging in the *Mahâbhârata* epic and the *Purânas*. Myths and allegories abound in these works, and often they are best explained from a yogic perspective. There are also riddles whose answers expectedly must be sought in the yogic environment of intense inner experimentation. A classic example is the two-level dialogue between two sages, Vandin and Ashtâvakra, which is found in the *Mahâbhârata* (3.134). At the first level, which is obvious, it consists of cryptic statements, extending over various sets from one to thirteen units each. At the deeper level, according to the seventeenth-century commentator Nîlakantha, this dialogue revolves around the philosophical positions of the two sages.

For instance, Vandin states that "a *single* fire flames forth as many [sparks]" to which Ashtâvakra responds that "the *two* friends Indra and Agni roam [together]." Nîlakantha explains that Vandin means to say that the many senses are ruled by a single faculty, namely the higher mind (*buddhi*). Ashtâvakra, a stout adherent of Advaita Vedânta, counters by stating that in addition to the higher mind a second faculty is needed, namely transcendental Consciousness. In other words, the *buddhi* requires the Self, or ultimate Consciousness, in order to manifest the phenomenon of ordinary consciousness. And so on.

The two Ashvins, the celestial physicians

Number symbolism has always been important to the Indic mind. Already the *Rig-Veda* contains hymns that delight in numeric riddles. The Vedic seers (*rishi*) were veritable masters in the art of symbolism and riddles. Language, they felt, can point to the dark enigmas that the logical mind fails to fathom but that become clear in inspired vision. The Vedic penchant for symbolism and riddles continued in the post-Vedic era.

The entire *Mahâbhârata,* for instance, appears to be constructed on the basis of the symbolic number 18, as I have explained in my *Introduction to the Bhagavad-Gîtâ*.[6] The war, which is the trigger of the epic's dramatic story and didactic passages, in all probability has historical roots, but it also has always been understood allegorically, as a moral and psychological struggle between good and evil forces both outside and within the human psyche. If the *Mahâbhârata* revolves around the ideal of *dharma,* or moral virtue, the epic drama of the *Râmâyana* is primarily concerned with the age-old ideals of truth and fidelity.

The divinized figures of King Râma and his beloved spouse Sîtâ have inspired countless


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generations in India. A beautiful example of archetypal poetic symbolism is present in the well-known Krishna legend, as told in the *Bhâgavata-Purâna*: The God-man Krishna plays his magical flute and enchants all the female and male cowherds, who fall in love with him and become utterly self-forgetful in his company—a symbol of the human psyche yearning for the ultimate Reality. The love play (*lîlâ*) between Krishna and the cowherds is an apt description of the playful dynamics that occurs on the yogic path between the aspirant and the *guru*, who embodies the transcendental Principle.

Krishna playing his magical flute

Shiva's world-destroying dance is another potent symbol that can be understood both cosmologically and psychologically. From a yogic perspective, the dance disentangles all the mental webs by which we have imprisoned ourselves through our incessant karmic activities or volitions. Shiva, as Natarâja ("Lord of Dance"), is the destroyer of our delusions and illusions. He is an inner force that undermines our laboriously created conceptualizations of the world, so that we may see reality "as it is" (*yathâ-bhûta*).

Shiva Natarâja

The Goddess Mohinî ("She who deludes") is thought to tempt us with misconceptions and delusional fantasies, so that only serious spiritual seekers can find their way to Reality. The elephant-headed, pot-bellied God Ganesha, again, is traditionally called upon to remove all such obstacles. Each deity represents a particular symbolic function whose depth we can plumb only when we delve into our own psyche by means of Yoga. The artistic representations of the numerous deities of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism all are full of yogic symbolism. That symbolism is most prominent in the profound teachings of Tantra. To appreciate this fact, we just need to look at the esoteric meaning of *hatha*—as in Hatha-Yoga, a branch of Tantra.

The dictionary meaning of the term *hatha* is simply "force" or "power," and the commonly used ablative *hathât* means "by force of" or "forcefully." Esoterically, however, the syllables *ha* and *tha*—quite meaningless in themselves—are said to symbolize "Sun" and "Moon" respectively. Specifically, they refer to the *inner* luminaries: the "sun" or solar energy coursing through the right energetic pathway (i.e., the *pingalâ-nâdî*) and the "moon" or lunar energy traveling through the left pathway (i.e., the *idâ-nâdî*). Hatha-Yoga utilizes these two currents—said by some to correspond to the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems respectively—in order to achieve psychoenergetic balance and mental tranquillity.

When this energetic harmony is achieved, the central channel (i.e., the *sushumnâ-nâdî*) is activated. As soon as the life force (*prâna*) flows into and up the central channel, it awakens the serpent power (*kundalinî-shakti*) and pulls it into the central channel as well. Thereafter the *kundalinî* rises to the crown of the head, leading to a sublime state of mind-transcending unified consciousness (or *nirvikalpa-samâdhi,* "formless ecstasy").

The symbolism of Kundalinî-Yoga is very intricate. Tantra also operates with an artificial


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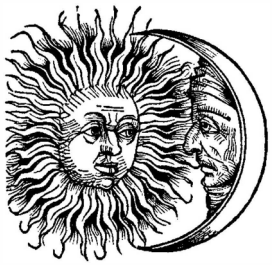

"twilight" language that is intelligible only to initiates. For instance, the widely used term *padma* ("lotus") may signify the vagina, while *vajra* ("thunderbolt") may represent the penis. It all depends on the context, and this is one reason why the *Tantras* are so difficult to translate; another reason is that they often deal with yogic experiences or intricate ritual practices unfamiliar to the uninitiated translator.

No systematic study of the incredibly vast and rich symbolism found in the scriptures of India has yet been undertaken, though it would be a most worthwhile—if challenging— task. Students, especially those dealing with Tantra, must sensitize themselves to the symbolic dimension so as not to fall prey to false literalism, which can lead to dogmatism and misapplication of the teachings.

### Notes

1. Sri Aurobindo, *On the Veda* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1956), p. 377.
2. See D. Frawley, *Wisdom of the Ancient Seers: Mantras of the Rig Veda* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Passage Press, 1992); J. Miller, *The Vedas: Harmony, Meditation, Fulfilment* (London: Rider, 1974); *The Vision of Cosmic Order in the Vedas* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).
3. See W. Johnson, *Poetry and Speculation in the Rg Veda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
4. H. Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*. Edited by J. Campbell (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 41.5. See S. A. Dange, *Sexual Symbolism from the Vedic Ritual* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1979).
6. See G. Feuerstein, *Introduction to the Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Quest Books, 1983), pp. 64-67.

> . . . the aim of science is to become philosophy, the aim of philosophy is to become religion, the aim of religion is to seek God, and thus the aim of humanity is to become Divine.
>
> **—Śrî Ânanda Âchârya**
> *Brahmadarśanam,* p. 65


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## FOR REFLECTION

1. What is your model of reality? What are your answers to the Big Questions: Who am I? Whence do I come? Whither do I go? What must I do? How well developed is your philosophy (we all have one!)? What are the main sources for your philosophical understanding of the world? What place does Yoga have in your model?

2. What, in your view, is truth or reality? How does it differ from a model?


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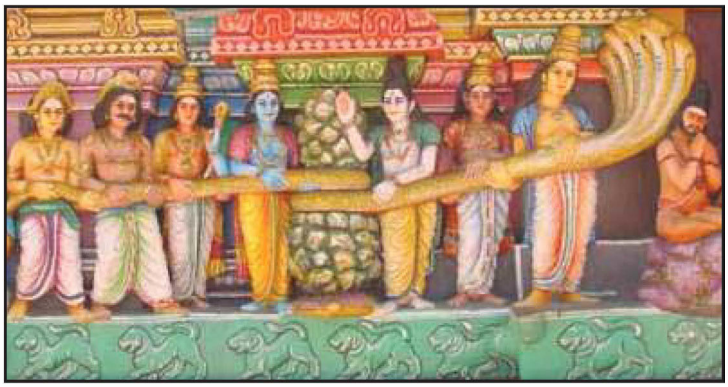
**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #5**

# The War of the Gods and Antigods

by Jagadish Dasa

One of the most popular myths reflecting deep yogic wisdom is the myth of the churning of the milk ocean found in many *Purânas* (encyclopedic sources of Hindu sacred and secular knowledge). In this narrative, the *devas,* or godly beings, are pitted against the *asuras,* or antideities, in a struggle to obtain the wondrous elixir (*soma*) that grants immortality.



The gods and antigods churning the milk ocean with the help of the cosmic serpent Ananta (the couch of Vishnu)

We can understand the yogic import of this old myth with the help of Tantra and traditional Hatha-Yoga. The *soma* is the energetic principle created through the successful practice of Yoga. The co-creative dynamics of *devas* and *asuras* represent the creative tension of the polar forces in the body-mind.

There are many other yogic symbols found in this myth. One such symbol is the golden mountain *meru*, which the two parties used to churn the milk ocean. Macrocosmically, *meru* symbolizes the world axis (Latin: *axis mundi*). Microcosmically, or psychologically, it stands for the central channel (called *sushumnâ-nâdî*), which is the energetic pathway that is activated by awakening the "serpent power," or *kundalinî-shakti,* in Tantra and traditional Hatha-Yoga. The milk ocean is the human unconscious and the deeper layers of psychophysical existence.

The mythical act of churning refers to the "alchemical" process of Yoga, which involves *tapas* and effects the gradual purification (*shodhana*) of our inner environment. In this purificatory process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many toxins are dispelled and a profound transformation occurs in the body and mind.

Thus, the narrative states that an incredible amount of poison was released during the churning, and only Shiva, the archetype of the perfected *yogin*, was able to swallow the poison and neutralize it. This act suggests that the adept is able to overcome all the conditioning that keeps others bound to the cycle of death and rebirth.

The myth has a happy ending, as the *devas* finally succeeded in quaffing the nectar of immortality. How might this story be relevant in your own life?

# IV. Yoga and the Modern West

## (YT, pp. xix-xxx)

> East and West, as well as North and South, need each other. Our species can no longer afford to be self-divided. Our future depends on whether we as individuals and as societies can learn—quickly—from the experiences of the different branches of our single human family, and discover how to live in harmony with one another.
>
> **—Georg Feuerstein**
>
> *Wholeness or Transcendence*, p. 31

## Main Points

**1.** Although there are basic cultural and psychological differences between the Eastern and Western branches of the human family, the gap is not unbridgeable. From the perspective of structures of consciousness, we as human beings share a deep similarity, which extends beyond culture and time. Recognizing the uniqueness of our time as well as our own individuality, we can approach our *common* spiritual heritage with a healthy understanding and appreciation of its potential to aid us in our personal and collective transformation. The dialogue between East and West has already significantly shaped our world.

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**2.** The Yoga tradition evolves with and through us. Our personal efforts in Yoga shape Yoga's future. Only through genuine individual change can transformation on a global and universal scale take place.


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## ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #6

# East and West

by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

Whether we like it or not we live in one world and require to be educated to a common conception of human purpose and destiny . . . We will realise that no people or group of peoples has had a monopoly in contributing to the development of civilisation. We will recognise and celebrate the achievements of all nations and thus promote universal brotherhood. Especially in matters of religion we must understand the valuable work of the sages of other countries and ages. . .

We need not merely a closer contact between East and West but a closer union, a meeting of minds and a union of hearts.

Mankind stems from one origin from which it has figured out in many forms. It is now striving toward the reconciliation of that which has been split up. The separation of East and West is over. The history of the new world, the one world, has begun. It promises to be large in extent, varied in colour, rich in quality.

—***East and West*** (George Allen & Unwin, 1955), pp. 130-131

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1988-1975) was a president of India (1962-1967) and an acclaimed philosopher. He authored many works, including his two-volume *Indian Philosophy,* and translated the principal *Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gîtâ, Brahma-Sûtra,* and *Dhamma-Pada.*

Those who condemn Indian culture as useless are ignorant of it, while those who commend it as perfect are ignorant of any other. The radicals and the conservatives, who stand for the new hope and the old learning, must come closer and understand each other.

**—S. Radhakrishnan**
*Indian Philosophy,* vol. 2 (Macmillan/George Allen & Unwin, repr. 1951), pp. 779–780


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## FOR REFLECTION

1. From how many different angles can you view a particular event? For instance, if you are in a supermarket with one hundred other people, will your experience of the supermarket be the same as theirs? In what ways do people's experiences differ? Think about age, gender, race, education, personal history, mood of the day—all of the factors by which our perceptions and thoughts are colored. Assuming (as we do in this course) that on the deepest level we are all concerned with inner freedom and ultimate happiness, how would you teach spiritual values and practices knowing people are so different? Could there be a single formula for taking all people into account equally?

2. How free are you? For example, do you feel free to express your innermost feelings? Or do you wish you could express yourself more freely? How free do you think are the people around you? Do you feel free enough to consider anything whatsoever in the privacy of your own mind? How free is our so-called free society really? How do habit patterns infringe on your freedom? How does your inner sense of freedom—or its absence—affect your perception and understanding of the world?

3. Make a list of your ten most cherished beliefs and consider how you acquired them and whether they are absolute truths or models. Also observe how these beliefs operate openly or secretly in your daily life.

4. Do you agree with Rudyard Kipling that there is no common ground between East and West? How, if at all, can you integrate the two distinct cultural styles in your own life? How can we overcome cultural stereotypes that are in the way of our understanding and appreciation of Eastern teachings?

The East teaches us another, broader, more profound, and higher understanding—understanding through life.

**—C. G. Jung**
*Psychology and the East,* p. 9


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# QUESTIONNAIRE #2

Please SUBMIT this questionnaire to TYS: tyslearning@sasktel.net
Don't forget to include your full name, email address, date, and course title. Please refer to our instructions on p. 17.

**1. How would you explain self-transcendence?** *(check one or more)*

(a) the act of continuous self-denial
(b) the absence of egotism
(c) the surrender of the notion of being an individual confined in space-time
(d) the renunciation of one's attachment to the body
(e) the experience of mystical union with a higher Reality

**2. Can Yoga be equated with the state of ecstasy (samâdhi)?** *(check one)*

(a) yes
(b) no
(c) perhaps

**3. Does the yogic idea that the ultimate Reality is beyond reason and even intuition mean that Yoga is irrational?** *(check one or more)*

(a) the absence of reason can only mean the presence of irrationality
(b) Yoga is not irrational but some of its viewpoints are irrational
(c) the concept of ultimate Reality is unnecessary and insistence on its validity is irrational
(d) the idea of ultimate Reality is not irrational but transrational
(e) not sure

**4. To what degree does symbolism play a role in Yoga?** *(check one)*

(a) symbolism is coincidental to Yoga
(b) one cannot understand Yoga without also understanding its symbolism
(c) it is helpful to know something about yogic symbolism in understanding Yoga


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**5. What is meant by a "verticalist" yogic teaching?** *(check one or more)*

(a) a teaching that is received while standing in the Tree Posture
(b) a teaching that de-emphasizes technology
(c) a teaching that involves renunciation
(d) a teaching that emphasizes *samâdhi*
(e) a teaching that is based on self-transcendence
(f) a teaching that regards reality as above our day-to-day reality
(g) a teaching that revolves around the ascent of consciousness

**6. How should we look upon Indian mythology in terms of Yoga?** *(check one or more)*

(a) Indian mythology is religious, Yoga is an experientially based science
(b) Yoga can help explain Indian mythology
(c) The teachings and practices of Yoga are vital to Indian mythology
(d) Indian mythology is entirely yogic
(e) Indian mythology has a minor overlap with Yoga

**7. Does Yoga recognize epistemological issues?** *(check one)*

(a) yes
(b) no, Yoga has no need for such theoretical considerations

**8. What is the status of Yoga's metaphysical teachings?** *(check one or more)*

(a) absolute truth
(b) merely a matter of faith or belief
(c) they are a model
(d) they are as valid as any theory

**9. What role does symbolism play in the *Rig-Veda*?** *(check one or more)*

(a) we must understand the teachings of the Vedic seers literally
(b) there is very little symbolism in the *Rig-Veda*
(c) if one were to remove all symbolic statements, we could still understand the basic teachings of the *Rig-Veda*
(d) symbolism is integral to the teachings of the Vedic seers
(e) we cannot understand the *Rig-Veda* completely without understanding its symbolism

**10. How do you practice self-transcendence from day to day? Please give practical examples** (200 words)


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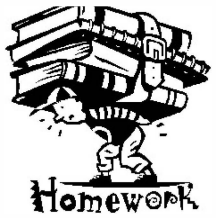
# LESSON 3

## I. Objectives

This lesson has the following two objectives:

- to explain the role of *guru*
- to explain the nature of discipleship
- to highlight the vital role of initiation in traditional Yoga

## II. Homework Assignments




- **Read** all of Chapter 1 in *The Yoga Tradition* book (pp.3–25), including Source Reading 2 (*Siddha-Siddhânta-Paddhati*).
- **Read** all sections in Lesson 3 of this Study Guide, including Additional Source Readings and Additional Study Materials #7–12. Use this Study Guide *alongside* the specified readings in YT.
- **Ponder** the questions under "For Reflection" and jot down your significant thoughts.
- **Answer Questionnaire #3 and submit.**
- **Practical Assignment:** How do you relate to authority? Specifically, how do you relate to your parents? Often our attitude toward our parents can tell us a great deal about our attitude toward authority and authority figures in general. If there are unresolved issues here, there are likely to also be difficulties in our relationship to a *guru*. It is, therefore, important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to examine this aspect of our life very carefully lest we should project upon our teachers our own problems and thus thwart the spiritual process.

## III. Introductory Remarks

Many Westerners stumble over the traditional Indian idea that the *guru* is identical with the ultimate Reality. False teachers have in fact abused this notion and caused their disciples disillusionment and harm. From the yogic perspective, all of us are identical with the ultimate Reality. Thus, there is no exclusivity attached to this concept. The difference between us and a true teacher (*sad-guru*) is that we do not know (firsthand) our identity with the Divine, but the *sad-guru* does.

Of course, not every teacher is a realized master. Therefore, a prospective disciple has to be prudent in his or her choice of teachers. In this lesson, we expound the criteria that will enable a spiritual seeker to not only distinguish authentic spirituality from fake spirituality and an authentic teacher from a rogue teacher but also to appreciate genuine (mature) discipleship from mere followership.

Even though most Westerners will probably not find a great spiritual master, this is a vitally important subject that, if properly understood, can prepare the ground for making the right approach if such a teacher should manifest for us. In any case, discipleship has always been at the core of traditional Yoga.

We cannot hope to build stably without firm foundations. The taller our building, the deeper must be our foundations.

In spiritual life, the best foundation is sincerity. As Henry David Thoreau put it: "Deep are the foundations of sincerity."

Conduct yourself toward your parents as you would wish your children to conduct themselves toward you.

**—Isocrates**, *As Demonicum* (4.14)

Conduct yourself toward your *guru* with the love and reverence you should have shown your parents but probably did not show them consistently enough.

**—Anonymous**


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## Chapter 1

# Building Blocks

**(YT, pp. 3–23)**

Depend upon it that, rude and careless as I am,
I would fain practice the yoga faithfully.

**—Henry David Thoreau** in a letter to Harrison Blake
*The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*
(New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), vol. 6, p. 175

## Overview

As the title "Building Blocks" suggests, this first chapter introduces the principal elements of Yoga, notably the meaning of the term *yoga* itself, the definition of a *yogin* (male Yoga practitioner) and *yoginî* (female Yoga practitioner), the concepts of *guru,* discipleship, and initiation, as well as the astonishing phenomenon of crazy wisdom.

## I. The Essence of Yoga

**(YT, pp. 3-5)**

### Main Ideas

**1.** Yoga is an incredibly complex and diversified *spiritual* tradition.

**2.** What makes Yoga a spiritual tradition is its affirmation of a transcendental Reality that somehow is the ultimate foundation not only of the world but of ourselves. This Reality—be it called "Divine," "God," "Goddess," "Absolute" (*brahman*), or "transcendental Self (*parama-âtman*)"—is superconscious (*cit*). It also is infinitely desirable, because it contains not a shred of suffering (*duhkha*). Some authorities go so far as to describe it as pure bliss (*ânanda*).

**3.** Yoga's goal is liberation, which is also referred to as "enlightenment," "Self-realization,"


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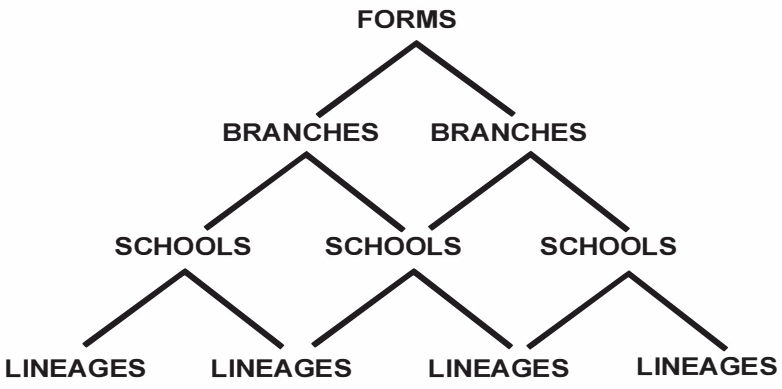
"God-realization," and other similar terms. Our present state of existence, which is one of suffering, is set in contrast to this ultimate goal of life. All yogic teachings presuppose that our highest fulfillment lies in the attainment of liberation, and there are a variety of paths that can lead us to this condition of utter transcendence.

**4.** *Samâdhi,* or ecstasy, is a vitally important phenomenon of the yogic path, but it is not equivalent to liberation. Even some *yogins* mistake *samâdhi* for liberation—a grave error that keeps them entrapped in the finite realms. *Samâdhi* can become as much a karmic obstacle as any other experience. Only in the case of the higher form of *samâdhi*, namely *asamprajnâta-* or *nirvikalpa-samâdhi*—can we break the vicious cycle of karma and rebirth (or, if you like, the vicious cycle of unconscious conditioning). This higher form of *samâdhi* is without contents of consciousness (*prajnâ* or *vikalpa*) and effects the gradual transmutation of our unconscious. Only *sahaja-samâdhi,* or spontaneous ecstasy, is identical with liberation. It is the same as "living liberation" (*jîvan-mukti*). Therefore only in this specific sense can *samâdhi* be said to be the ultimate goal of Yoga.

Sculpture of Patanjali

**5.** Most often, the goal of Yoga is stated in terms of the union (*yoga*) between the lower self and the ultimate Self (or ultimate Reality). But other understandings exist. In Patanjali's Classical Yoga, for instance, the goal is said to be the separation (*viyoga*) of the transcendental Self from the objective world. The objective world stands here for the transcendental insentient Ground called *prakriti* ("creatrix") *plus* all its evolutionary products down to the material universe. The former way of talking about the yogic goal makes more sense within the nondualist schools; the latter way best fits dualistic models like Patanjali's. Strictly speaking, however, both interpretations are problematical from a philosophical point of view. How can the lower (empirical) self be said to unite with the ultimate or transcendental Self? Upon liberation (or enlightenment), the lower self (i.e., the ego-personality) evaporates and only the transcendental Self (or Reality) remains. Within the branch of Bhakti-Yoga, there are many schools that insist on a subtle wall between the Creator and created beings.





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**6.** Most yogic teachings include the following basic elements:

- *Starting Point:* The premise that ordinary life is filled with suffering
- *Goal:* A teaching on the nature of liberation, or enlightenment
- *Method*: A path leading to liberation
- *Metaphysical Underpinning:* A philosophical/cosmological/epistemological treatment revolving around philosophical categories like self, world, God/Spirit/Self, reality, unreality, immanence, transcendence, and so on

"What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."

**—Ludwig Wittgenstein**

*Tractatus Logico Philosophicus,* proposition #7

**7.** The above four basic elements can be easily grouped into the categories of theory and practice, the two complementary and necessary aspects of any yogic approach. *Theory* includes the philosophy and metaphysics of a specific yogic teaching. *Practical method* stands for the techniques employed in different stages to attain the realization that is the goal of the practice. Devoid of a definite goal, yogic methods or techniques lack practical direction. Without being grounded in practice, theories are more or less disembodied metaphysics. The condition of suffering cannot be truly overcome by an incomplete teaching.

**8.** The various philosophies of Yoga are all based on experimentation and experience, but they also include a certain amount of theorizing. It is one thing to have direct experience (or *realization*) of something, and quite another to talk about it. Talking about something always involves the limitations of conceptual language.

**9.** The philosophical/metaphysical differences between the various forms, branches, and schools of Yoga can be explained partly as (a) *actual differences* in experience or realization and partly as resulting from (b) the *diverse linguistic and cultural contexts*.

**10.** The goal of liberation can be aspired to in two major ways: (a) by *dissociating* from what wisdom shows to be inessential and unreal (i.e., our entire ego-personality) or (b) by *associating* with the ultimate Reality through intent (or aspiration), meditation, and ecstasy, etc. An example of the former approach is the Vedântic procedure of *neti neti* ("not thus, not thus"), meaning "I am not this, not that." An instance of the latter approach is the Vedântic maxim "I am the Absolute" (*aham brahma asmi*).

**11.** The goal of Yoga, once again, is liberation (*mukti, moksha, kaivalya*) and not identification with any finite process or manifestation. If one identifies overly with a particular path or a formula, this represents another attachment that must be overcome. The most familiar analogy is perhaps that of the "finger pointing to the moon." Instead of looking in the direction into which the finger points, we fixate on the finger. That is to say, we mistake the way to liberation for actual liberation itself.


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## A Zen Story

"Words," said the teacher, "are only guideposts. Never confuse words with reality. Here, I'll show you."

The teacher called out to his dog and ordered it: "Fetch me the moon." He pointed to the full moon as he was giving the command. Then the teacher addressed his disciple asking: "Where is my dog looking?"

"He's looking at your finger, venerable teacher."

"Exactly. Don't be like my dog!"

## What Yoga Means to Me

by Georg Feuerstein

When I first discovered Yoga, I knew something momentous had happened. Everything suddenly began to make sense, and I felt I had come home. I was still too young—fourteen—to fully appreciate how Yoga would reshape my whole life. Looking back, I can say that from the moment I discovered Yoga, it started to revolutionize my entire way of thinking and being. Now, over four decades later, it is perhaps legitimate to claim that it has proven its validity as a spiritual lifestyle.

Life and Yoga have become one and the same for me. Even the unyogic things I still do, say, and think are all reviewed—at the end of the day—in the light of Yoga's timeless teachings. This allows me to continue to melt down old habit patterns and replace them with the kind of openness that Yoga stands for.

I am irrevocably committed to the spiritual process, which at a deep level brings peace to my mind, and a sense of humor too.


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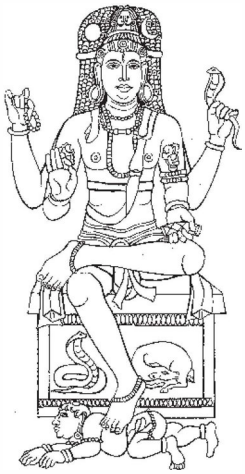
## *Comments on Source Reading 1*

# Dakshinamûrti-Stotra

### (YT, pp. 12-14)

The numbers in parentheses refer to the verses in the *Stotra*.



Dakshinamûrti

- These verses in glorification of Dakshinamûrti (Shiva) are a profound revelation of the *guru* principle. The author, supposedly Shankara, extols Shiva as the archetypal *guru* figure, who experiences the universe as if contained within himself as in a dream (1), or as if shining forth from his immense being (4).
- Elements of a nondual perspective (*advaita-vâda*) can be seen in certain verses (such as 1-3). For instance, the universe is referred to as being illusory (2).
- Shankara shares a vision of Dakshinamûrti as the great revealer and liberator (3, 7, 14) who removes the illusion of false self-identification (5, 6, 8). The process of awakening to the truth of Self is to hear (*shravana*), to reflect (*manana*), and to deeply contemplate (*nididhyâsana*) the meaning (10) of the teachings. This great revelation occurs in the deep silence of the Deity (12, 15) and through gestures (7, 15).
- Dakshinamûrti is envisioned as imparting these truths to the great seers, all the teachers in the world. It is to this supreme *guru* that Shankara continuously offers his prayers and obeisances. In other words, he views his own human *guru* as an embodiment of the Self-revealing Divine.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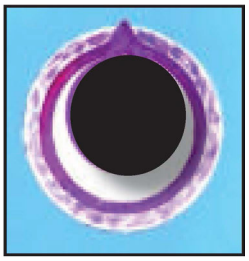
**ADDITIONAL SOURCE READING**

# Tejo-Bindu-Upanishad (5.58b-74)

Translated by Georg Feuerstein

Recommendation: When reading the following extract from the *Tejo-Bindu-Upanishad* (see YT, pp. 317-318), please bear in mind that this is an ecstatic declaration that, if you will allow it, can lift you into a similar state of consciousness. Also, this text uses the language of paradox to transcend mental preconceptions. This device becomes enjoyable and meaningful when you give yourself permission to temporarily suspend the need for strict logic.



The *bindu* (central point) corresponds to the *axis mundi* (world axis), or the Greek concept of the navel (*omphalos*) of the universe, as depicted below.

You, verily, are the supreme Self. You are the supreme *guru*. (5.58b)

You, verily, are of the form of space. You are always devoid of the witness. You, verily, are all states [of existence]. You are undoubtedly the Absolute (*brahman*). (5.59)

You are devoid of time. You are time. You are ever the Absolute, a mass of Awareness (*cit*). You are everywhere the essence of yourself. You are endowed with a mass of Consciousness (*caitanya*). (5.60)

You are truthful. You are accomplished. You are eternal. You are free. You are liberated. You are joyous [and] immortal. You are God. You are peaceful. You are free from ill (*nirâmaya*). You are the Absolute. You are the Whole (*pûrna*). You are higher than highest. (5.61)

You are the nectar-of-immortality (*soma*). You are Being (*sat*). You are eternal. You are revealed by [sacred] words like "Truth." You are devoid of limbs. You are ever stable. You are manifesting as Brahma, Indra, Rudra, and so on. (5.62)

You are free from any delusion about manifestation (*prapanca*), yet you are evident in all beings. You are everywhere free from volition (*samkalpa*). You are evident from the inner meaning of all the *Âgamas*. (5.63)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You are everywhere in the pose (*âsana*) of contentment and ease. You are free from movement, etc. You are everywhere free from goals, etc. You are constantly being contemplated by Vishnu and the other deities. (5.64)

You are of the essence (*sva-rûpa*) of Awareness-Space. You are pure Awareness, unfettered. You abide in the Self alone. You are utterly void (*shûnya*), unqualified. (5.65)

You are blissful. You are supreme. You are one only, without a second. You are of the essence of bliss and a mass of Awareness, essentially whole. (5.66)

You are Being. You are you. You are the Knower. You are He. You know. You see. You are of the form of Being-Awareness-Bliss. You certainly are Vasudeva, the Lord. (5.67)

You are immortal. You are omnipresent. You are in motion and at rest. You are everything. You are devoid of everything. You are peaceful (*shânta*) and beyond peaceful (*ashânta*). (5.68)

You are the radiance of Pure Existence (*sattâ-mâtra*). You are existence in general. You are of the essence of eternal potency (*nitya-siddhi*). You are free from all potencies. (5.69)

You are devoid of insignificance (*ishanmâtra*).You are free from atomic matter (*anu-mâtra*). You are free from orthodoxy (*astitva*). You are free from heterodoxy (*nâstitva*). (5.70)

You are devoid of characteristic (*lakshana*) and what is characterized (*lakshya*). [You are] formless, free from ill (*nirâmaya*). You are within all sounds. You are devoid of parts and limits. (5.71)

You are devoid of Brahma, Vishnu, Îsha. You appear as your own essence. You are the remainder of your own essence. You are immersed in the ocean of your own bliss. (5.72)

Brahma

You, verily, are yourself in the domain of your Self, free from your own condition. You are of the essence of the Whole that remains [when everything illusory has been subtracted]. You see nothing other than yourself. (5.73)

You do not move from your own essence. You flower with your own essence. You are none other than your own essence. You, indeed, are Me alone. Be convinced [of that]! (5.74)


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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #7**

# Is Yoga a Religion?

by Georg Feuerstein

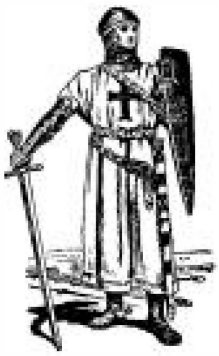
Some Westerners who are practicing Christians or Jews are concerned about Yoga being an Eastern religion. They fear that by taking up the practice of Yoga, they might undermine their own religious faith. Are their fears warranted? Is Yoga a religion? The quick answer to both questions is: Instead of undermining their personal faith, Yoga can actually deepen it. In the following I will offer a slightly more detailed explanation.

Let me begin with the extremist position of Christian fundamentalism, which regards Yoga as a dangerous import from the East that should under all circumstances be shunned. Often Yoga is lumped together with New Age teachings, which are seen as a threat to the Christian establishment.

Yoga, it is quite true, has historically been associated with India's three great religious-cultural traditions—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Thus the teachings of Yoga are infused with many concepts that have a Hindu, Buddhist, or Jaina flavor. The most striking examples, which often are a stumbling block for Westerners, are the ideas of *karma* and reincarnation and the notion of there being many deities in addition to the one ultimate Reality. First of all, there have been Yoga masters who dismissed the ideas of *karma* and reincarnation, and the deities of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism can be compared to the angels of Christianity and Judaism.

Thus, in order to practice Yoga, you need not believe in *karma* or reincarnation. *You need not believe in anything other than the possibility that you can transform yourself,* that you can go beyond your present understanding and experience of the world and, more significantly, beyond your current egocentric state of being.

At the heart of all forms of Yoga is the assumption that you have not yet tapped into your full potential as a human being. In particular, Yoga seeks to put you in touch with your spiritual core—your innermost nature—that which or who you truly are. That nature is described differently by the various schools



The crusades were a manifestation of religious fundamentalism and were clearly not in the spirit of nonharming taught by Jesus of Nazareth.

**You need not believe in anything other than the possibility that you can transform yourself.**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of Yoga. Rather than being expected to believe in any of the traditional explanations, you are free to allow your personal experience and realization to shape your understanding.

Over the millennia, Yoga has become associated with various philosophical and theological systems—none of which can be said to define Yoga itself. For Yoga is first and foremost a practical spiritual discipline that emphasizes personal experimentation and verification. In other words, direct personal experience or spiritual realization is considered senior to any theory or conceptual system.

For this reason, Yoga can and in fact has been practiced by people with widely differing philosophies and beliefs. Some Yoga practitioners believe in a personal God who created the universe; others favor a metaphysics that regards the world as illusory and the ultimate Reality as singular and formless. Yet others (notably the *yogins* of Theravâda Buddhism) refuse to speculate about metaphysical matters. Accordingly, some Yoga practitioners are more religious than others. But Yoga itself is simply a tool for exploring the depth of our human nature, of plumbing the mysteries of the body and the mind.

## FOR REFLECTION

**1.** Consider what the traditional goal of Yoga—liberation—means to you.

**2.** Consider whether and to what degree you want to transform yourself with the aid of Yoga. Make a list of all the things you do to make the yogic/spiritual transformation possible in your case. And then make a list of all the things you do that prevent you from changing profoundly.

**3.** As we grow on the yogic path, the insights of great masters can be a wonderful source of inspiration for us. The Yoga tradition is our common heritage, a living record against which our insights can be tested and examined. What ideas from Yoga have been particularly helpful to you personally?

**4.** A subtle point is raised in YT, p. 5, namely that "liberation is not a technique but a way of being in the world without being of it." What this implies is that human life can be lived from the "viewpoint" of consciousness or, more strictly speaking, pure Awareness. A number of traditions posit that one can remain as the transcendental Witness, which is the Self (*âtman*). Thus there is no longer identification with the body/mind. This refers to the state of *jîvan-mukti*, or liberation while in the body.


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FOR REFLECTION ctd.

**5.** In the course of expounding fundamental truths rooted in personal realization, teachers develop diverse frameworks and employ philosophical language to communicate their understanding to a specific audience. One thing to consider as you go through this *Study Guide* and *The Yoga Tradition* is whether or not teachings are context- or culture-bound. Try to sense the dynamics of different elements of yogic praxis, as well as the nuances of spirituality involved in each teaching we examine.

**6.** We often hear the statement, "All paths lead to the same goal." But is liberation, the goal of Yoga, the same in every case? Or do the Buddhist *nirvâna*, the Vedântic *moksha*, Patanjali's *kaivalya,* and the *brahma-nirvâna* of the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* denote distinct realizations? There is sufficient evidence to show that these designations are not merely linguistic variations. This fact becomes strikingly obvious when one compares the concept of liberation in theistic schools with that of atheistic systems, such as Classical Sâmkhya. For example, in his *Yatîndra-Mata-Dîpikâ* (8.16), the seventeenth-century teacher Shrînivâsa Dâsa makes the following highly relevant remarks:

> Seekers of liberation of are of two kinds: those who strive for *kaivalya* and those who strive for *moksha*. What is called *kaivalya* [is attained] through the Yoga of wisdom and consists in the realization of one's innate Self as distinct from Nature. This realization . . . is without the realization of the Lord.

As opposed to *kaivalya*, *moksha* is said to be realized through loving attachment (*bhakti*) to God or through unconditional self-offering (*prapatti*). A careful analysis of the scriptures of other systems shows up further differentiations in the concepts of emancipation. Thus, it appears that the transcendental unity of all religions postulated by some historians of religion is a theological oversimplification.

At the same time, however, it is also true that these differential concepts of liberation have a common denominator, namely the realization of a level of being that transcends the ordinary space-time continuum. But this must not blind us to the equally significant distinctions. The evidence suggests that there are actual nuances in the state of liberation, as realized by the adherents of diverse schools. Sages and philosophers may want to debate whether these nuances are in fact degrees of completeness of realization.

What are your own thoughts/feelings about this important theological point? Do you believe that there is only one ultimate Reality? If so, is this transcendental


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Singularity realized in the same way by all sages, and are all differences in their explanation merely linguistic differences? Or do you think that all such speculations are futile and impractical?

## II. What's in a Name?—The Term *Yoga*

**(YT, pp. 5–7)**

### Main Points

**1.** Yoga is a generic name for the psychospiritual technology of India. To appreciate the use of the word "technology" in connection with Yoga, please refer back to the Introduction (YT, p. xxviii).

**2.** We should reserve the name *yoga* for traditions originating in India and giving themselves that name. Labels like "Jewish Yoga," "Christian Yoga," or "Egyptian Yoga" can be misleading.

**3.** There are many different traditional interpretations of the term *yoga*. For traditional examples, see below under Additional Study Materials #8 (p. 68).

**4.** The term *yoga* is found in many instances in the Sanskrit literature, from the ancient *Rig-Veda* to relatively more recent works, such as the manuals of Hatha-Yoga. When Western students talk about Yoga, they often mean the postures taught in Hatha-Yoga. When Indian students talk about Yoga, they generally mean the philosophical system of Patanjali, called Râja-Yoga, or Classical Yoga.

**5.** It is useful to distinguish between the three principal *forms* of Yoga (Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina) each of which has various *branches* (e.g., Hatha-Yoga, Râja-Yoga, etc., within Hindu Yoga). The *branches,* again, consist of various *schools* (e.g., Goraksha's school within Hatha-Yoga), and these form diverse *lineages* (i.e., lines of transmission from teacher to student). These distinctions, however, are not used uniformly in the existing literature or even in *The Yoga Tradition*.


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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #8**

# Traditional Definitions of Yoga

Translated from the Sanskrit by Georg Feuerstein

"Yoga is the control of the whirls of the mind (*citta*)."
—*Yoga-Sûtra* (1.2)

"Yoga is skill in [the performance of] actions."
—*Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (2.50)

"Yoga is ecstasy (*samâdhi*)."
—*Yoga-Bhâshya* (1.1)

"Yoga is said to be the oneness of breath, mind, and senses, and the abandonment of all states of existence."
—*Maitrî-Upanishad* (6.25)

"Yoga is the union of the individual psyche (*jîva-âtman*) with the transcendental Self (*parama-âtman*)."
—*Yoga-Yâjnavalkya* (1.44)

"Yoga is said to be the unification of the web of dualities (*dvandva-jâla*)."
—*Yoga-Bîja* (84)

"Yoga is known as the disconnection (*viyoga*) of the connection (*samyoga*) with suffering."
—*Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (6.23)

"Yoga is said to be the unity of exhalation and inhalation and of blood and semen, as well as the union of sun and moon and of the individual psyche with the transcendental Self."
—*Yoga-Shikhâ-Upanishad* (1.68-69)

"This they consider Yoga: the steady holding of the senses."
—*Katha-Upanishad* (6.11)


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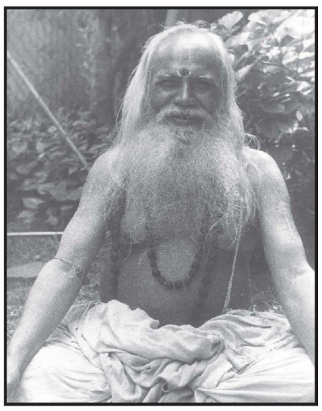
"Yoga is called balance (*samatva*)."
—*Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (2.48)

"Yoga is said to be control."
—*Brahmânda-Purâna* (2.3.10.115)

"Yoga is the separation (*viyoga*) of the Self from the World-Ground (*prakriti*)."
—*Râja-Mârtanda* (1.1)



Sâdhu
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## FOR REFLECTION

**1.** How would *you* define Yoga? Which of the definitions given above under Additional Source Materials #8 do you most resonate with? Which do you find the least appealing, and why?

**3.** If self-transcendence lies at the heart of all Yoga, how does this tally with the definition of Yoga as "control"?

**4.** Do you feel that any of Yoga's teachings contradict your own religious beliefs? If so, which? How do you resolve the conflict?

**5.** What do you think of the claim made by some people that Jesus visited Kashmir and that he was inspired by yogic wisdom?


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# III. Degrees of Self-Transcendence: The Practitioner (Yogin or Yoginî)

**(YT, pp. 7-8)**

"That which is night for all beings in that is the self-controlled [*yogin*] awake. That in which beings are awake is night for the seeing sage (*muni*)."

—*Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (2.69)

## Main Points

**1.** *Yogin* is the Sanskrit term denoting a (male) practitioner of Yoga and can be loosely applied for all spiritual practitioners. *Yogî* is the nominative case of the term, and *yoginî* is used to denote a female practitioner. Cognate terms are *sâdhaka* and *abhyâsin* (*sâdhikâ* and *abhyâsinî* for female practitioners).

**2.** There are many stages of spiritual development on the path of Yoga. These distinct phases have been classified in diverse scriptures, yet there is no universally accepted developmental model. Practitioners are classified according to:

- degree of commitment (see the models of Vijnâna Bhikshu, the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ,* and Vyâsa, YT, pp. 7-8)
- freedom from the phenomenal world and absorption in the subtle or even transcendental dimension of existence (see the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* and Vâcaspati Mishra, YT, pp. 7-8). This can be seen as a linear, verticalist model (see YT, p. 7).
- spiritual competence (*adhikâra*), which relates to the type of discipline we will or ought to take up in light of our individual psychosomatic constitution. Tantra groups aspirants into three categories: *pâshu* ("creaturely" or even "beastly"), *vîra* ("heroic"), and *divya* ("divine"). *Pâshu* denotes the mass of humanity devoid of special spiritual qualities; *vîra* stands for those who are spiritually motivated

Sculpture of Vyâsa, who is traditionally said to be the compiler of the *Vedas, Purânas,* and many other works


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and competent, as well as emotionally mature. The *divya* practitioner is highly qualified in all respects. (Tantra is discussed in YT, pp. 341-368.)

The hallmark of the advanced *yogin* is freedom from the constraints of false self-identification. A mature practitioner is able to assume the position of the witness and thus bring considerable nonattachment to his or her own intellectual-emotional activity, as well as the behavior of others. Unless inner yogic states serve to transform our whole being, they are hardly worthy of pursuit. We need not only achieve spiritual insight or peaceful meditation states, but our inner development must be reflected in all areas of our life, especially our relationships and work.

The rate of our spiritual development is balanced by at least three factors:

- our level of commitment
- our degree of karmic conditioning
- the intervention or guidance of a Yoga adept

Some Yoga practitioners would add to the above three a fourth factor—the unpredictable grace (*prasâda*) of the Divine (see YT, p. 248).

As we are all unique, there can be no perfect map for charting our personal path. Models of development and techniques are secondary to the specialized instruction of an accomplished Yoga adept, who can foresee the karmic challenges that confront us at present or in the future. The exchange between a qualified teacher and student is meant to catalyze this sweeping process of transformation and bring us to ultimate transcendence and total self-transformation.

> Man is never helped in his suffering by what he thinks for himself, but only by revelations of a wisdom greater than his own. It is this which lifts him out of his distress.
>
> **—Carl Gustav Jung**
> *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*
> (New York: Harvest Books, 1933), p. 231


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## FOR REFLECTION

**1.** Reflecting on the traditional models of spiritual development (discussed in YT, pp.7-8), what is your notion of a spiritually advanced individual? Think of those by whom you have been deeply inspired or who you feel are spiritually mature. What is it about them that makes them spiritual according to your judgment? Is it their loving presence or practicality and stability in difficult circumstances? Is it compassion or wisdom, renunciation or charisma?

**2.** What spiritual goals have you set for yourself and how do you go about realizing them?

**3.** In the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (2.54-58), Arjuna asks Krishna to describe to him the characteristics of an enlightened or Self-realized adept. What do you think of Krishna's answer? (There are several translations of this text online.)

When we run after our shadow to catch it, the shadow will never be caught; the shadow will always outrun us. But if we run towards the Sun, turning our back on the shadow, it will dog us. Similarly the moment you turn towards these outside matters and want to grasp them and keep them, they will elude your grasp, will outrun you. The very moment you turn your back upon them and face the Light of lights, your inner Self, that very moment favorable circumstances will seek you.

**—Swami Rama Tirtha**
*In Woods of God Realization*
(Lucknow: Rama Tirtha Pratisthan, 1978),
vol. 1, p. 143


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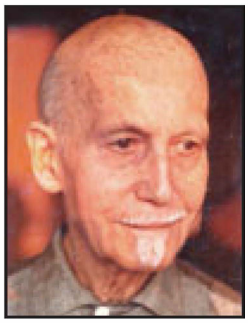
# IV. Guiding Light: The Teacher

## (YT, pp. 8-12)

"No seeker is so wise, so informed, so perfect, or so balanced as not to need the constructive criticism and expert counsel of a true spiritual guide."

**—Paul Brunton**

*The Notebooks of Paul Brunton,* Volume 2: *The Quest* (Burdett, New York: Larson Publication, 1986), pp. 222-233



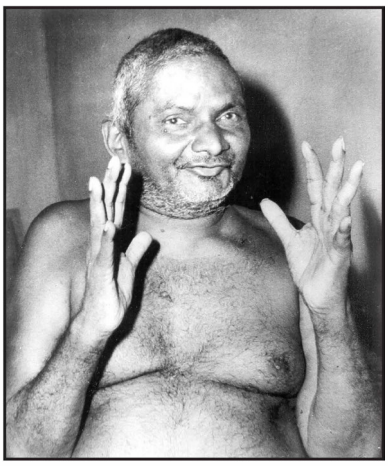
Paul Brunton

**"**The path is difficult and sharp like a razor's edge. So say the learned ones."

—*Katha-Upanishad* (1.3.14)

## Main Points

**1.** Yoga is an initiatory tradition. Initiation is the "spiritual birth" of the seeker by which his or her higher potential is made to unfold more rapidly. This occurs through the grace (*prasâda*) of an adept, or realized master, who imparts divine knowledge (*divya-jnâna*). This "knowledge" is a foretaste of enlightenment. This process is marked by an aspirant's deepening attraction to the ultimate Reality.



Swami Nityananda in initiatory mood

**2.** The tradition of the initiatory teacher/disciple system dates back to the early Vedic period (4500-2500 B.C.). At that time, wisdom was transmitted orally. Those who studied and recited the sacred lore were considered "learned." The term *shruti,* oral instruction and strict memorization. Later the role of the *guru* was aided and even replaced by written texts. which is applied to the Vedic revelation, implies that the teachings are heard. It was forbidden to write down the *Veda,* and education proceeded by oral instruction and strict memorization. Later the role of the *guru* was aided and even replaced by written texts. While no scripture can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replace the direct instructions and transformative presence of a truly realized master, texts are important as authoritative records of the insights of realizers. Hence scripture holds a central place in many schools of Yoga, and study (*svâdhâya*) continues to be a vital aspect of Yoga practice.

**3.** The traditional process of Vedic study involved living for a period of studentship at the home of the teacher (*guru-kula*) after initiation. Students were expected to practice chastity (*brahmacarya*), serve the teacher, and dedicate themselves to study. The qualified teacher was well versed in traditional knowledge, had realization of its import, and was of high moral standing and compassionate.

--A group of *yogins*

*© Marshall Govindan*

**4.** The tradition of spiritual-religious education was maintained by a highly supportive culture, which was overseen by the *brahmins,* functioning as the custodians of India's spiritual legacy. The heritage of knowledge remained vital in the Post-Vedic era, and great emphasis was placed on maintaining it as faithfully as possible.

**5.** In the traditional *guru*/disciple relationship, the student was under the care of the *guru*. This often involved material provisions, but the disciple accepted a life of voluntary hardship and ascetism. Often students would beg offerings for the teacher and then had to arrange for their own needs. The *guru* assumed complete responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a student. Later, in some traditions, the *guru* accepted the weight of the actions and consequences (*karma*) of a disciple. Thus spiritual education involved a high degree of commitment and responsibility on both parts.

**6.** At the end of a training, students were expected to remunerate the teacher. This *dakshina* fee could be a token gift or a substantial offering, depending on the tradition. Many Yoga practitioners today are familiar with the account of Shri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, the great modern exponent of Hatha-Yoga. At the completion of a seven-year period of study he was instructed by his *guru* Ramamohan Brahmachari to "marry, raise children and teach Yoga." In response, Krishnamacharya vowed: "I will serve my *guru*. In this world I will be a slave to nobody, work under nobody. Money and status mean nothing to me." This vow was in keeping with the traditional notion that the best gift we can give to our teacher is to practice intensively. The Yoga legacy we have received from Krishnamacharya and other great twentieth-century masters was


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empowered and shaped by their personal practice.

> There are great Masters and small Masters. Both of them do exactly the same work, for great Masters are for great disciples and small Masters for small disciples. The relationship between Master and disciple is the same in both cases.
>
> **—Lizelle Reymond**
> *To Live Within* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 143

**7.** There are many types of *gurus*, who are differentiated by their realization, function, style of teaching, and personal qualities.

**8.** Spiritual realization is in no way bound by institution, age, gender, race, or social status. The true preceptor (*sad-guru*), or fully realized master, is considered to be an embodiment of the Divine and is understandably revered by initiates and lay people alike. Such masters are rare but they exist.

**9.** Some texts mention the "inner teacher." Ordinarily, we are subject to great spiritual ignorance. When we sincerely apply ourselves to the process of self-transformation and self-transcendence, an inner sensibility awakens. First this innate wisdom aids us in recognizing a true teacher or teaching. Next, a living *guru*, who is regarded as an outward manifestation of this subtle inner principle, shows us how to access and awaken the inner teacher.

**10.** The function of the *guru* is to awaken the disciple. Those who are adequately prepared and equipped with a sincere desire for liberation the *guru* can—through hints or empowerment—direct to see beyond the veil of illusory self-identification. In *bhakti* traditions, in addition to empowering disciples to transcend the limited ego-perception, the *guru* endows them with *prema,* or divine love.

**11.** The following is a brief overview of the nature of the *guru* according to authorities from various historical periods:

- The *Manu-Samhitâ*, reflecting the socioreligious attitude of the *Vedas*, explains the *guru* as one who gives knowledge of the *Veda*, including the rites and sacraments, as well as the moral obligations of the individual and society.
- The *Upanishads* emphasize the mystical (*guhya*) basis of the transmission from teacher to student. As part of this process, the *Shvetâshvatara-Upanishad* (6.23) is the first Vedic scripture to clearly call for devotion to the *guru*. The *Mândûkya-Kârikâ* (1.29), again, offers the classical definition of the *guru* as one who "knows" the soundless and multi-sounded sound *om,* that is, who has realized the ultimate Reality beyond all duality.
- The two epics and the various *Purânas* further reveal the devotional element in the *guru*-disciple relationship and reiterate many of the principles found in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. The *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (4.34) advocates learning the spiritual science from those who are seers of Reality (*tattva-darshin*), that is realizers of the transcendental


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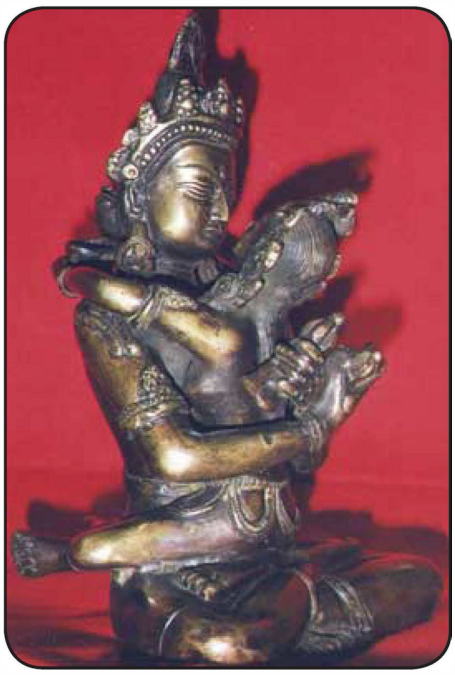
Reality. The *Bhâgavata-Purâna* (11.17.27) affords the true *guru* the status of divinity, arguing that he or she is not different from God and a bestower of liberation.

- In Tantra, the *guru* is also raised to the status of the Divine, and female *gurus* used to play a central role in some schools, especially when Tantra first emerged in about 500 A.D. or slightly earlier.

- In the three vehicles (*yâna*) of Buddhism, we find a diversity of notions about the *guru* as well as the salvific role of the transcendental Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In contrast to the *guru-yoga,* especially of Vajrayâna (Tibetan) Buddhism, Gautama the Buddha himself insisted: "Be lamps unto yourselves. Let the *dharma* be your guide."

- For the Sikhs, the *Âdi-Granth* serves as the *guru*. But, then, this sacred book is the condensation of the wisdom of various Sikh masters.

- The important role of the saints and teachers of the Jaina tradition is mentioned at various places in Chapter 6 of *The Yoga Tradition*.



Tantric deities in embrace

The Guru is within the temple of my mind.
The Guru is my wealth and affluence.
The Guru is my body, mind and all.
The Guru is my life indeed.
He is the donor of the whole Universe.

**—Swami Satyananda Saraswati**

*Bhakti Yoga Sagar: Satsangs with Swami Satyananda Saraswati* (Fort, India: Bihar School of Yoga), p. 194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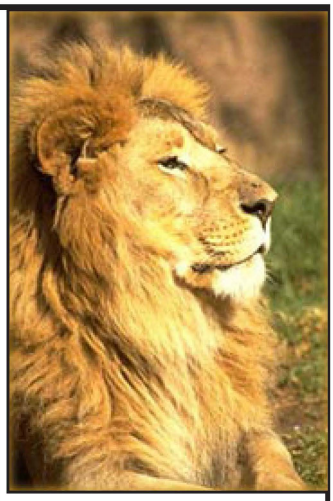
# The Washerman and the Lion



After a long day's work at the river, the washerman called out to his son: "It's getting dark. Get ready to go home. I'm more afraid of night than I am of a tiger or lion."

Overhearing the remarks, a lion hiding in the bushes, thought: "Who is this Night that the man fears it more than me, the king of the jungle?" He felt a twinge of fear in his own heart.

Ready to leave, the washerman was looking for his donkey to load it with a large bundle of washed clothes. Night was settling in quickly, and the man's eyesight was not the best. He spied what he believed to be his donkey crouching in the bushes. He heaved the bundle onto the animal's back, gave it a good kick, and told it to start moving home.

Feeling lucky that he got away with just a kick, the lion obediently carried the burden to the washerman's house. He did not even react when the man tied him to a stake and ordered him to stay put. The lion was just worried about the mysterious Night, who was mightier than he.

Before sunrise, the man untethered what he still believed to be his donkey, loaded the lion up with a bundle of unwashed clothes, gave it another kick, and then both headed back to the river.

Another lion was watching the scene, and as soon as the washerman got busy with his day's chores, he approached the donkey lion and said: "I can't believe you let this man treat you that way. Don't you have any pride?"

"You don't understand," said the first lion. "He has Night on his side. If he dares to kick and order me around, this Night, which he really fears, must be incredibly powerful."

"Nonsense!" said the other lion. "He's just a human being. We lions rule the jungle. Why don't you roar just once to see what would happen?"

The first lion roared. When the washerman looked up and spotted the lion in the dim light of dawn, he was absolutely terrified and ran as fast as he could.

The moral of the story is that when the *guru* enters into the disciple's life, he just points out the truth, and fear and delusion take flight.

Based on a story told by Swami Sivananda in *Sadhana* (Sivanandanagar: Divine Life Society, 2d ed., 1967), p. 623.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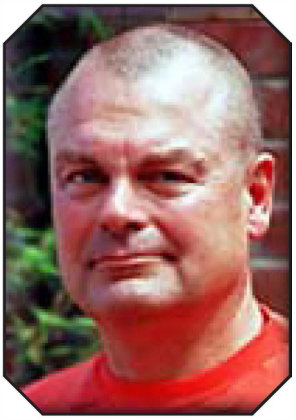
## ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #9

# Select Readings on the Guru-Disciple Relationship

The role of the teacher is basically twofold: first, to arouse the deepest creative power of Life present within you; then, to support you as this power unfolds. As this happens, the creative power of Life makes you aware of the intimate interrelationship of all spirit and matter, and of the oneness of all spirit. Supported by the teacher, you enter into an experience of union not only with the teacher, but also with that teacher in whom your own teacher is unified, and with the Teacher from whom all things have come forth. . . .

Furthermore, the physical teacher represents both a support and a resource—not a conspiracy to make you bound and dependent. The physical teacher doesn't exist to dominate your life, and no teacher with half a brain would even want to. What would be the point? Instead, the teacher is simply like a well from which you draw a clear, pure vitality which supports the process of your regeneration and transformation. It may take the form of advice, instruction, or a subtle but powerful exchange of energy; all of these are ways in which this fundamental essence articulates its creative power.

**—Swami Chetanananda**
*The Breath of God* (Cambridge, Mass.: Rudra Press, 1973), p. 40



Swami Chetanananda

The select readings on this page and the next two pages speak of the *guru* in masculine terms, because male teachers have always been in the majority. We kindly ask you to mentally add a "she" to every "he."

What should be one's attitude if this ancient and time-honoured institution of the spiritual preceptor is to be of real practical benefit to you? The Guru . . . awakens you when you have temporarily fallen off from the awareness of the Ideal and the means and methods for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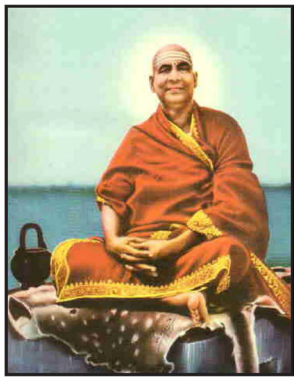
shining, luminous spirit. But he has forgotten his nature, and the Guru as conceived of by the genius of India is the one that does the awakening work. Awakening and teaching also mean a reciprocal willingness to learn on the part of the one who is in need of the Guru. Also it suggests another idea: that if one would but keep himself ever ready to receive any such awakening impulse [he would] find such awakening impulses abound in nature.

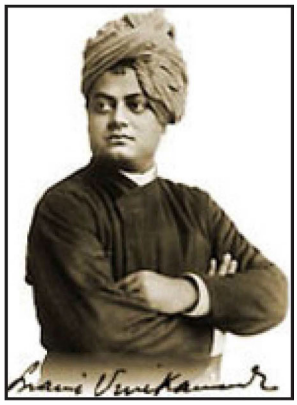


Swami Sivananda

God has so constituted creation as to make it an ever-ready teacher. Nature Herself, the whole of creation, is a grand Guru, is a great teacher of mankind, ever imparting precious lessons, if man would but put himself in the proper receptive attitude.

**—Swami Sivananda**

*Sadhana: A Text-Book of the Psychology and Practice of the Techniques to Spiritual Perfection* (Sivanandanagar, India: Divine Life Society, 1967), pp. 541-542



Swami Vivekananda

No one is ever really taught by another; each of us has to teach himself. The external teacher offers only the suggestion, which arouses the internal teacher, who helps us to understand things.

**—Swami Vivekananda**

*Karma-Yoga and Bhakti-Yoga* (New York:Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1982), p. 81

Sri Aurobindo

As the supreme Shastra (knowledge of the truths, principles, powers and processes that govern the realization) of the integral Yoga is the eternal Veda secret in the heart of every man, so its supreme Guide and Teacher is the inner Guide, the World-Teacher, jagad-guru, secret within us. It is he who destroys our darkness by the resplendent light of his knowledge. . . . He discloses progressively in us his own nature of freedom, bliss, love, power, immortal being. He sets above us his divine example as our ideal and transforms the lower existence into a reflection of that which it contemplates.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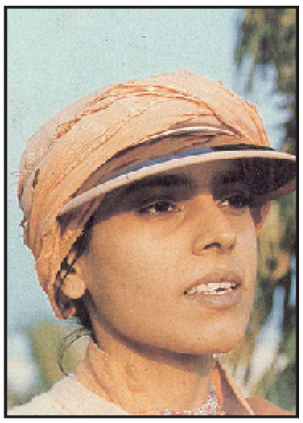
By the inpouring of his own influence and presence into us he enables the individual being to attain the identity with the universal and transcendent.

**—Sri Aurobindo**

*Essays on the Gita* (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1916), p. 15

Many people have argued that a guru is not necessary, that the real guru is within us. This is true. But how many of us can claim to hear him, understand him, or follow his instructions? In fact, we even tend to doubt his existence. The mental concepts of man are limited and gross. The mind is a tumult of turbulent passions, desires and ambitions. Amidst all this commotion, how is it possible for you to hear the voice of your guru, which is the voice of silence? It is as futile as holding a conversation with a person who is hard of hearing, in a room where a band is playing at full volume. In order for him to understand any part of what you are saying, the music must be turned off.



Swami Satyasangananda

In the same way, we have to turn off the tumult within our minds, if we wish to comprehend the sound of silence which belongs to our inner guru. But is it possible to do this, when we don't even understand the patterns of our minds? . . . To stop this inner turmoil, we require a guru. It is he who has mastered the laws which govern the mind, body and spirit. He alone can show the way to transform the negative patterns of our mind which stand between us and our inner guru. It is he who manifests our inner guru as a part of our personality.

It is the living guru who leads us inwards. He serves as a detonator to explode the great power dormant within us. When that is done and we are able to contact the inner self at will, then we may say that we do not need a guru; but not until then.

**—Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati**

*Light on the Guru and Disciple Relationship* (Munger, India: Bihar School of Yoga, 1984), pp. 5-6



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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #10**

# The Guru: Dispeller of Darkness

by Georg Feuerstein

There is an ancient Upanishadic prayer with which many Yoga students are familiar:

**asato mâ sad gamaya**

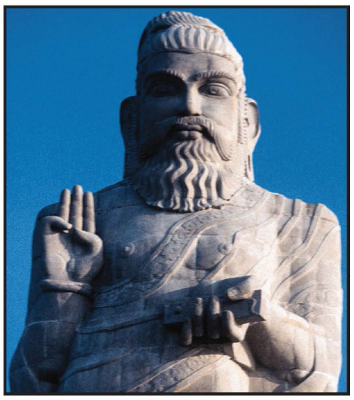
**tamaso mâ jyotir gamaya**

**mrityor mâ amritam gamaya**

> From the unreal lead us to the Real.
> From darkness lead us to the Light.
> From death lead us to Immortality.

These lines from the *Brihad-Âranyaka-Upanishad* (1.3.28) capture the very essence of spiritual life, which is a movement away from the finite toward the Infinite, the ultimate Reality. This movement, however, does not occur in external space but inwardly. The whole struggle toward liberation or enlightenment is a drama enacted within and by the mind. Spiritual life is essentially a matter of the cultivation of appropriate attitudes and values.

The above three lines are in the form of a prayerful request or petition. They are addressed to the Divine. But they could just as well be addressed to the *guru* who, if he or she is fully realized or enlightened, is so totally immersed in Reality as to be traditionally considered as an embodiment of the ultimate Reality.



Viruvalluvar

For us Westerners this is very difficult to grasp and even more difficult to accept. When we stand before a *sad-guru* (if we should be fortunate enough to meet one), we tend to see only the bodily person in front of us. In other words, we only see with our eyes, and hence we do not see deeply enough. Our physical sight is actually an impediment when it comes to divining a true teacher. We are spiritually blind. We can develop a proper (spiritual) relationship to him or her only when we come to fully understand that the realized sage is, in consciousness, always and irrevocably identified with the ultimate Reality.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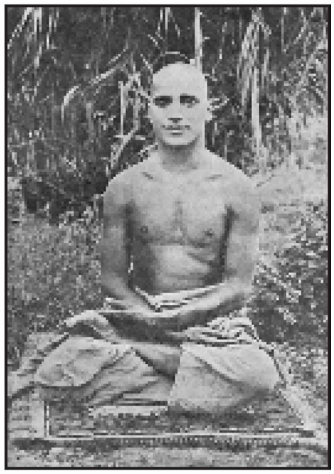

Swami Rama Tirtha
(1873-1906)

Understandably, the many would-be masters who nowadays peddle their wares on the open market and compete for disciples do not inspire much faith and confidence in one. I have met a fair number of them, and exceedingly few have struck me as having achieved more than a modest skill in meditation or the "party tricks" (the paranormal powers), both of which also can be acquired by completely unspiritual rogues. Only a few had a radiance about them marking them as genuine practitioners. But realized beings of the caliber of a Ramana Maharshi (of Tiruvannamalai, India) or Swami Rama Tirtha are few and far between.

There is a traditional piece of wisdom that states that a teacher can take disciples only to his or her own level of realization. Thus some teachers will be able to boost one's 20-watt light to perhaps 200 or 2,000 watts or maybe even to 20 kilowatts. This would certainly bring one a little closer to the "luminosity" of enlightenment, but to be close does not mean to be there. Some teachers are inclined to forget this, and many students are anyway not motivated sufficiently to go all the way and to look for a *sad-guru*, a teacher of the True who can take them safely the whole route.

Not a few students think they can make it on their own. They are merely deceiving themselves. I had a period in my own life where I fostered this mistaken view. I ran into more cul-de-sacs than I care to remember! The irony is that I cannot even plead ignorance about the traditional function of the *sad-guru*: I had read all the texts and studied many of them in depth. But disappointments with teachers along the path can easily color one's perspective.

Fortunately, many years ago, I came to believe very firmly that a spiritual teacher is essential. And if one really wants to go the whole way, one must be prepared to look for a genuine *guru*. And the best and perhaps only way of finding such a teacher is by diligently preparing oneself. A well-known traditional saying has it that when the disciple is ready the *guru* will appear. I feel that this is as true today as it was millennia ago. The *sad-guru* is the gate, and *sat-sanga* or "true relationship" to such a teacher is the key.

Swami Rama Tirtha was one of the great nineteenth-century masters of Jnana-Yoga. Born in the small village of Murariwala in the Punjab, he enjoyed listening to the story of Rama as a child. Later he learned Yoga from Dhana Rama and subsequently Swami Madhava Tirtha at Dvaraka Matha. For a short time he served as a professor of mathematics at the Forman Christian College before he assumed the life of a wandering renouncer spreading the message of Vedanta with a *bhakta's* heart overflowing with love.


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## ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #11

# The Guru Function: Broadcasting Reality (Excerpt)

by Georg Feuerstein

There are many types of spiritual teachers, all differing in their spiritual maturity, intellectual capacity, learning, personal complexity, and style of teaching. To simplify, many teachers are just one or two steps ahead of the student. Yet, while their spiritual attainments may be quite modest, they can still be helpful to seekers, providing they remain humble, honest, and alert. It is all too easy for up-and-coming teachers to commit the egocentric error of wanting to play master.

Then there are those who have advanced farther on the ladder of self-transcendence and enlightenment. Naturally, they can be of immense help to seekers, who need guidance, confirmation, and occasional encouragement. Because of their inner attainments, such teachers also display the curious psychophysical effect of "spiritual contagion." This effect, which enhances the quality of the disciple's being and consciousness, is particularly pronounced in the case of an enlightened master. Such teachers, therefore, have always been highly valued in the esoteric traditions of the world.

Some adepts, like Ramana Maharshi or Faquir Chand, become teachers by default, because people seek out their company and spiritual help, though they themselves would be content to live in solitude. Others choose to have a few disciples whom they can instruct in a more intimate way. Yet others, like Gautama the Buddha, set out to create a whole new path and community.

Some teachers prefer to be informal with their disciples, while others insist on formality. There are teachers who interfere only minimally in the day-to-day living of their disciples, and then there are teachers who prescribe and enforce a strict lifestyle. Some teachers are quiet and ordinary, while others, like Bhagwan Rajneesh (*alias* Osho) or Sathya Sai Baba, prefer a more flamboyant style of self-presentation. Some adepts choose relative silence as a means of communicating with their disciples; others, like Jiddu Krishnamurti, are forever eloquent, believing that knowledge can somehow point the way to enlightenment. Some teachers refuse to call themselves teachers, because they feel they have nothing to teach; their teaching consists in their merely being present.

The multiple functions and roles of the authentic adept have two primary purposes. The first is to penetrate and eventually dissolve the egoic armor of the disciple, to "kill" the phenomenon that calls itself "disciple."


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The second major function of the *guru* is to act as a transmitter of Reality by magnifying the disciple's intuition of his or her true identity. Both objectives are the intent of all spiritual teachers. However, only fully enlightened adepts combine in themselves what the Mahâyâna Buddhist scriptures call the wisdom (*prajnâ*) and the compassion (*karunâ*) necessary to rouse others from the slumber of the unenlightened state. In the ancient *Rig-Veda* (10.32.7) of the Hindus, the *guru* is likened to a person familiar with a particular terrain who undertakes to guide a foreign traveler. Teachers who have yet to realize full enlightenment can guide others only part of the way. But the accomplished adept, who is known in India as a *siddha,* is able to illumine the entire path for the seeker.

Such fully enlightened adepts are a rarity. Whether or not they feel called to teach others, their mere presence in the world is traditionally held to have an impact on everything. All enlightened masters, or realizers, are thought and felt to radiate the numinous. They are focal points of the sacred. *They broadcast Reality.* Because they are, in consciousness, one with the ultimate Reality, they cannot help but irradiate their environment with the light of that Reality This spiritual "field effect" apparently extends to all creatures and things, but is particularly felt by those who are in close proximity to the adept or who are sensitive to his or her spiritual transmission. The natural "aura" of the enlightened being, which has a transformative effect, obliges the world to engage in involuntary spiritual practice (*sâdhana*). Yet, because it is involuntary, its effect remains limited.

Swami Muktananda

The spiritual "presence" of the teacher is felt as a force impinging on the body. Both Bhagwan Rajneesh and Swami Muktananda, who achieved world renown in the 1970s and 1980s, delighted in demonstrating their ability to manipulate and project this force both with individual students and in large gatherings. This was a large part of their spectacular attraction.

> [The *guru*] must have complete knowledge and be proficient at transmitting energy and removing all obstacles. He should always be pure, simple, and straightforward, capable of bestowing wisdom and making love flow. He must know that true Principle just as it is. He must have become one with That. He should be content with whatever comes to him and free of addictions. He must also be a master of diplomacy.
>
> **—Swami Muktananda**
> *Secret of the Siddhas* (South Fallsburg, N.Y.: SYDA Foundation, 1980), pp. 59-60


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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #12**

# True Gurus, False Gurus, Crazy Gurus (Excerpt)

by Georg Feuerstein

Idries Shah

How can one tell the genuine master from the fraudulent opportunist, whose paradoxy and holy folly simply conceal wanton inconsistency? The question is pressing but by no means new. It has been asked again and again over the millennia, and for two reasons. First, because there is no easy answer and, second, because the chaff is never far from the wheat, that is, darkness is never far from light.

There are not a few *gurus* who profess to be, or are portrayed by their followers as being, if not *the* World Teacher, then at least fully enlightened masters. The question of authenticity naturally rears its head. Who would deny that there are, in the words of Idries Shah, "phonies" among today's crop of spiritual teachers?[1] In addition to the fakes, there are also the self-deluded. In most other cases, I daresay, the claim to enlightenment falls far short of reality, though no intentional deception may be at work. The temporary experience of *unio mystica,* or ecstatic unification, is often confused with enlightenment. Also, some practitioners mistake the peculiar "witnessing" state for transcendental realization.

The existence of fake *gurus*, or *gurus* who are less than they claim or pretend to be, is certainly deplorable, but their fraudulence or weakness should not induce us to discard the figure of the spiritual guide as a whole. Psychologist John Welwood, who has given these issues considerable thought, observes:

> To discount all spiritual masters because of the behavior of charlatans or misguided teachers is as unprofitable as refusing to use money because there are counterfeit bills in circulation. The abuse of authority is hardly any reason to reject authority where it is appropriate, useful, and legitimate. It is possible that in the present age of cultural upheaval, declining morality, family instability, and global chaos, the world's great spiritual masters may be among humanity's most precious assets. Glossing over important distinctions between genuine and counterfeit masters


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> may only contribute further to the confusion of our age, and retard the growth and transformation that may be necessary for humanity to survive and prosper.[2]

In view of the sophistication displayed by some of the more successful counterfeit *gurus*, the question of authenticity is urgent. We sense something of this problem in the Biblical story of Jesus' asking his disciples to state who they thought he was, in contrast to the public opinion. Several centuries earlier, as recorded in the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (11.54-72), the warrior-mystic Arjuna asked his theophanic *guru*, Krishna, about the signs by which one may recognize a truly enlightened being. How, Arjuna inquired, does the one who is "steadied in gnosis" *(sthita-prajnâ)* speak, sit, and move about? Krishna responds by speaking of the God-realizer's psychological characteristics—notably his or her ego-freedom, inner peace, and detachment. This is the approach taken in most of the Sanskrit literature. Thus the *Uddhava-Gîtâ* (6.8.11-12), which is one of the many "imitation" *Gîtâs,* contains these stanzas:

> The sage *(vidvan),* though abiding in a body, does not [really] abide in a body, rather like one who has awakened from a dream. The fool, however, though not abiding in the body, nevertheless abides in the body like one seeing a dream.
>
> Thus unattached while reclining, sitting, walking, bathing, seeing, touching, smelling, eating, and hearing, etc., the sage is not bound by the "qualities" [of Nature] in any [of his actions]; although abiding in Nature, he is unattached, like sky, Sun, and wind.

Krishna and Arjuna

But how can we judge whether a teacher is truly unattached, beyond egoism, and above the play of Nature's forces? Again John Welwood makes a most valuable point:

> We cannot rely on descriptions of external behaviors alone to distinguish between genuine and problematic spiritual teachers. Developing criteria for judging a teacher's genuineness by examining external behavior alone would, for one thing, neglect the context—both interpersonal and intrapersonal—from which the behavior draws its meaning; and for another, it would tend to identify one particular model of a spiritual teacher as being ideal or exclusively valid, which would be as great a fallacy as elevating a single mode of psychotherapy to a similar position.[3]

Welwood further notes that therapists have very dissimilar personalities and employ many different styles of therapy, and, we might add, are varyingly competent. They are found to help some but not necessarily all of their clients. Similarly, not every *guru* is good for every disciple. The relationship between master and student is one key. The other, as Welwood points out, is the source of a teacher's authority. In the case of an awakened adept, that source is his or her enlightened attunement to Reality itself. In all other cases, which constitute the overriding majority, the teacher is authorized by a competence that falls short of enlightenment, or direct realization.


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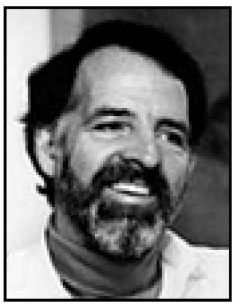
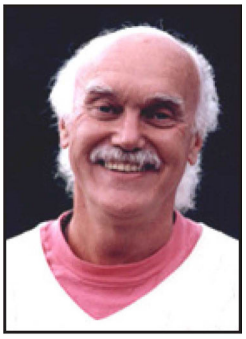


John Welwood

The trouble is that an unenlightened teacher may present himself or herself as a fully awakened adept and dupe credulous devotees. The history of spirituality is full of questionable individuals of this kind. Scandals of rogue teachers have made the headlines repeatedly in recent years.

What lessons can we learn from all of this? First, the seeker must understand that spiritual teachers represent different levels of personal attainment and that enlightenment is rare indeed. Second, the seeker must acknowledge that, being a seeker rather than a master, he or she is not properly qualified to pronounce *final* judgment about any teacher's level of spiritual attainment. The editors of the widely read volume *Spiritual Choices* proffer this excellent advice:

> It is impossible for one who is lodged in mundane consciousness to evaluate definitively the competence of any guide to trans-formation and transcendence, without having already attained to an equal degree of transcendence. No number of "objective" criteria for assessment can remove this "Catch-22" dilemma. Therefore the choice of a guide, path, or group will remain in some sense a subjective matter. Subjectivity, however, has many modes, from self-deluding emotionality to penetrating, illuminative intuition. Perhaps the first job of the seeker would best be to refine that primary guide, one's own subjectivity.[4]



Ram Dass

Ram Dass (Richard Alpert), who has functioned on both sides of the fence (as a devotee of Neem Karoli Baba and as a teacher in his own right), has made the following complementary observation:

> Some people fear becoming involved with a teacher. They fear the possible impurities in the teacher, fear being exploited, used, or entrapped. In truth we are only ever entrapped by our own desires and clingings. If you want only liberation, then all teachers will be useful vehicles for you. They cannot hurt you at all.[5]

This is true only ideally. In practice, the problem is that in many cases students do not know themselves sufficiently to be conscious of their deeper motivations. Therefore they may feel attracted precisely to the kind of teacher who shares their own "impurities"—such as hunger for power—and hence have every reason to fear him or her. It seems that only the truly innocent are protected. Although they too are by no means immune to painful experiences with teachers, at least they will emerge hale and whole, having been sustained by their own purity of intention.

Accepting the fact that our appraisal of a teacher is always subjective so long as we have not ourselves attained his or her level of spiritual accomplishment, there is at least one important criterion that we can look for in a *guru*: Does he or she genuinely promote disciples' personal and spiritual growth, or does he or she obviously or ever so subtly undermine their maturation?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Would-be disciples should take a careful, levelheaded look at the community of students around their prospective *guru*. They should especially scrutinize those who are closer to the *guru* than most. Are they merely inferior imitations or clones of their teacher, or do they come across as mature men and women?

The question of a teacher's authenticity can be answered only when we see the gestalt of his or her work with disciples. It is not important whether a teacher can go in and out of mystical states at will, or whether he or she can perform all kinds of paranormal feats, or whether he or she can jolt the disciple's nervous system through the transmission of life force, and so forth. It does not even make any difference whether the teacher enjoys a large following. What really matters is whether a *guru*, in effect, works the miracle of spiritual transformation in others.

Ye shall know them by their fruits . . . every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

**—St. Matthew (7.16-18)**

## Notes

1. See the conversation between Idries Shah and Elizabeth Hall in "The Sufi Tradition," *Psychology Today* (July 1975), p. 53.

2. D. Anthony, B. Ecker, and K. Wilber, *Spiritual Choices: The Problem of Recognizing Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation* (New York: Paragon House, 1987), pp. 299-300.

3. J. Welwood, "On Spiritual Authority: Genuine and Counterfeit," in Anthony, Ecker, and Wilber, *Spiritual Choices,* p. 292.

4. R. Dass, *Journey of Awakening: A Meditator's Guidebook* (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), p. 126.

5. Anthony et al., *Spiritual Choices,* p. 6.


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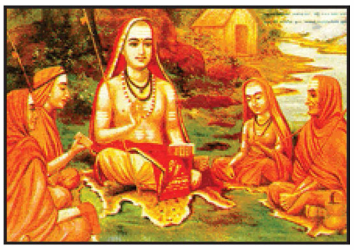
**ADDITIONAL SOURCE READING**

# Eight [Verses] on the Teacher (*Guru-Ashtaka*)

## Attributed to Shankara Âcârya

Translated by Georg Feuerstein

One may have a beautiful body, a [lovely] wife, far-reaching fame, or wealth like [the golden] Mount Meru, but as long as one's mind is not attached to the lotus feet of one's *guru*, what of it? What of it? What of it? What of it? (1)



Shankara and students

One may have wife, wealth, sons, and grandsons, as well as a house and [good] relatives—all of it, but as long as one's mind is not attached to the lotus feet of one's *guru*, what of it? What of it? What of it? What of it? (2)

One may have knowledge of the [four] *Vedas* along with the six auxiliary [sciences] and the textbooks [ready] on one's lips or have poetic genius (*kavitva*) or [be able to] create good prose, but as long as one's mind is not attached to the lotus feet of one's *guru*, what of it? What of it? What of it? What of it? (3)

One may think "I am well off in my own country and honored in other countries," or "There is no one like me in matters of good behavior," but as long as one's mind is not attached to the lotus feet of one's *guru*, what of it? What of it? What of it? What of it? (4)

One's lotus feet may always be served by hosts of worldly rulers and emperors in the round of the world (*kshama-mandala*), but as long as one's mind is not attached to the lotus feet of one's *guru*, what of it? What of it? What of it? What of it? (5)

[One may think:] "Because of my generosity and austerities, my fame has spread into all corners, and through grace all things in the world are in my hands," but as long as one's mind is not attached to the lotus feet of one's *guru*, what of it? What of it? What of it? What of it? (6)

The mind [may be preoccupied] with enjoyment, Yoga, bravery, rulership, the face of a maiden, or wealth, but as long as one's mind is not attached to the lotus feet of one's *guru*, what of it? What of it? What of it? What of it? (7)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[One may think:] "My mind does not dwell on [retiring to] the forest, my own house, activities, the body, or on what is invaluable," but as long as one's mind is not attached to the lotus feet of one's *guru*, what of it? What of it? What of it? What of it? (8)

The virtuous person—be he an ascetic, ruler, student, or householder—who reads this octad on the *guru* and whose mind is fixed on the words uttered by the *guru* will attain the desired object known as the state of *brahman*. (9)

## FOR REFLECTION

**1**. What do you perceive to be the qualifications of a *guru*?

**2.** What qualities appeal to you in a teacher?

**3.** Do you feel the need for a spiritual guide or is it unnecessary for you on your spiritual path?

**4.** Do you think you would benefit from a teacher who maintains a more traditional authoritarian role?

**5.** The traditional model of studentship in the Vedic system was a rite of passage for young males before they could enter the adult life. This marked a time where they could have a sound religious/spiritual orientation toward life before making practical choices. Whether they decided to continue on in a vocation dedicating their full life to spirituality was partly an individual choice. This type of rite of passage occurred in most traditional societies. Do you feel it is missing from contemporary life?

**6.** Does accepting a *guru* appeal to you? Why or why not? Have you had any mentors or close personal teachers that have simulated the role of a traditional *guru*?

**7.** In traditional contexts, the psychological distance between the *guru* and the disciple is greatly proportioned. Do you feel the traditional relation between *guru* and disciple applies cross-culturally?


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# V. Learning Beyond the Self: The Disciple

## (YT, pp. 14-16)

"A qualified *guru* is first and foremost a qualified disciple."

***—Popular adage***

Yama, Lord of Death

When Yama, the deity of death, offered three boons to the aspirant Naciketas, the young seeker showed no interest in material things but wanted to know the great secret of how to attain liberation. He was an ideal seeker of Truth.

## Main Points

1. The most important quality of a disciple is the capacity for self-transcendence manifesting in various ways, including the ability to submit to discipline. In traditional Yoga, the idea is paramount that through the guidance and transmission of a teacher a disciple can grow on the spiritual path with fewer hindrances.
2. Traditionally, when a student from the three upper classes (priestly, warrior, and commercial) wished to embark on Vedic study, he would approach a teacher formally, bearing a number of items that exhibited his desire to submit to the rigorous learning process. This protocol was symbolized in the three fuel sticks offered to the prospective teacher. Some commentators have described these three sticks as symbolic of reverence (*pranipâta*), inquiry (*pariprashna*), and service (*sevâ*), as given in the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (4.34). One must approach a realized master, prostrating with the whole body and offering oneself from the heart. Only then can discipleship prove fruitful.
3. An aspirant's competence or qualification is called *adhikâra*. There are many levels of competence, and teachers generally can determine very quickly how competent a disciple really is. Before giving deeper teachings, they may require a disciple to pass through one or more tests. Next a teacher will prescribe a suitable path of practice and monitor carefully a disciple's progress.


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*Guru* and *shishya*

4. Relationship implies exchange. In the *guru*/disciple relationship, the teacher gives the gift of access to our true nature, while the student is expected to be self-giving (*âtma-samarpana*), which traditionally often included giving the *guru* his or her material assets as *dakshina*. Offering of goods and services to the *guru* is not intended to enrich the teacher but to help the disciple to dismantle self-centered motivations and, ultimately, the ego illusion. Often, *gurus* accept (or sometimes even demand) gifts from their students, but then they distribute them to those in need.

5. Skill in removing a disciple's ego fixations is the teacher's specialty. Thus a disciple can expect to undergo many trials set by the *guru*. *Sad-gurus* (true teachers) clearly have the capacity to accelerate their disciples' spiritual development, and they sometimes even create difficult situations that are meant to intensify the quest for ultimate self-transcendence.

6. We can usefully distinguish between a *student* and a *disciple,* the latter representing a deeper commitment to the spiritual process and greater devotion to the teacher. Discipleship typically involves the practice of *guru-yoga,* consisting in a devotional response to one's teacher, who is considered an embodiment of the transcendental *guru* function. This element of devotion to the *guru* can be glimpsed in the following verse from the *Shvetâshvatara-Upanishad* (6.23):

> These [sacred] topics that were taught are revealed to the great soul (*mahâ-âtman*) who has supreme devotion to God (*deva*) and to the *guru* as God; they are [indeed] revealed to that great soul.

7. In the Vedic era and later, students lived in the teacher's household, which helped develop the relationship between them and the teacher. This "intimacy" is at the heart of *guru-bhakti,* by which a living connection is made, faith is awakened and matured, and the disciple grows to deeper levels of commitment and competence. At some point during this phase of discipleship, a student receives initiation(s) into the secrets of the lineage.

8. Shankara qualified the process of spiritual education in three stages: receiving oral teachings from a qualified preceptor (*shravana*), reflecting upon the inner meaning of the teachings (*manana*), and contemplating those teachings until authentic realization is attained (*nidhidhyâsana*). Only when the teachings have been understood through the "eye of spirit" born of contemplation (*vijnâna*) is the process complete. In some schools, the culmination of this process consists in a disciple faithfully and compassionately disseminating the lineage knowledge to others.

9. The general goals of Vedic study can be said to be (a) the development of character, (b) the acquisition of spiritual knowledge, and (c) the attainment of liberating wisdom.


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## FURTHER READING

There are a few existing translations of the *Guru-Gîtâ* of the *Skanda-Purâna*, and one accessible translation is that by Swami Muktananda, found in a chanting booklet called *The Nectar of Chanting* (New York: SYDA, 1983).


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# On Discipleship

1. *Commitment:* There is the following interesting account of the succession of the Buddhist saint Bodhidharma, who is attributed with bringing Buddhism from India to the Far East (China). One aspirant traveled far to reach Bodhidharma's cave where, legend has it, the great teacher had sat in meditation for nine long years. The weary traveler cut off his own arm and presented it to Bodhidharma as an offering. The sage recognized the student's genuine commitment and transmitted the Dharma to him.

2. *Perseverance:* Tradition tells of Marpa the Translator who ordered Milarepa to construct one building after another only to find an excuse for having him tear it down again. With unbelievable steadfastness but growing despair, Milarepa obeyed his *guru* and, in the end, attained enlightenment. Marpa himself underwent incredible hardship to receive teachings from his own Indian master Naropa, and Naropa's story also includes interminable tests at the hands of Tilopa. As Patanjali writes in his *Yoga-Sûtra* (1.14), for practice to bear good fruit, it must be cultivated properly, uninterruptedly, and for a long period of time.

Marpa

3. Many scriptures furnish guidelines for the *guru*-disciple relationship, which not only bears out the superlative importance of this relationship but also impresses on us its potential difficulty. All spiritual aspirants should be aware of the expectations and mannerisms of traditional teachers and teachings. At the same time, it is important for teachers and students to understand that basic boundaries exist in all relationships. Benevolence, wisdom, compassion, and open communication are helpful starting points for both practitioners and teachers.

4. *Serving the Guru:* The traditional phrase *gurur manobhishtha sevâ,* which means "serving the *guru's* heart desire," suggests the greatest return gift a disciple can offer to the teacher. In this connection, a beautiful story is told of the Vaishnava teacher Râmânuja and his teacher Yâmuna. Upon reaching his *guru's* hermitage, Râmânuja discovered that his teacher was in the process of leaving the body. He could no longer speak but held up three fingers. Râmânuja promptly named the three wishes his teacher had in mind for him to fulfill, and Yâmuna passed away peacefully and with his attention fixed in God. Consequently Râmânuja was recognized as his natural successor and spent the


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On Discipleship ctd.

rest of his life fulfilling the three wishes in his *guru's* heart.

The essential message is that the disciple must imbibe the spirit of the *guru*. Râmânuja was recognized as the successor of Yâmuna, even though he did not even have the opportunity to study with him. In fact, he learned his *guru's* teachings from five of Yâmuna's direct disciples. Because of his unique capabilities, he was able to understand the subtleties of Yâmuna's spiritual teachings, and therefore was looked upon as the legitimate holder of that great master's lineage.

**Râmânuja**

Q: The guru-disciple relationship seems to be a particular construct, which some people choose to engage while others don't.

GF [Georg Feuerstein]: Yes. It's an artificial situation.

Q: Why do people take it on?

GF: It helps us grow. We can't understand the mechanism of the ego in a vacuum. The ego can be reflected back to itself only when it looks in the mirror. We are "blind," and so the guru puts up all these mirrors around us. And wherever we look, we see our own chaos, which of course had to do also with the chaos of society, the arbitrariness of the arrangement. We realize the ego is just a product of all of this craziness of mind. When we really, really see it's a convention, a device that was reinvented in order to make meaning out of nothing, we can step beyond it. So, the guru constantly undermines meaning. And you let go. And then there's freedom. Genuine freedom, not just a vacuum within the chaos.

**—Mariana Caplan**

*Do You Need a Guru?*
(London: Thorsons, 2002), pp. 184


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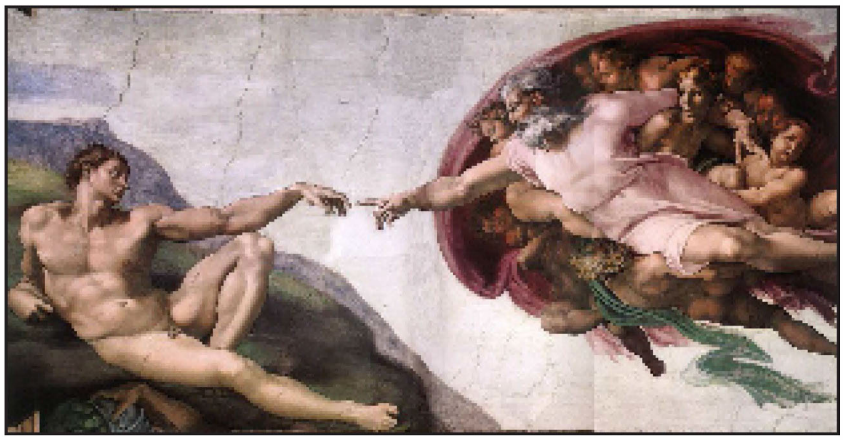
# VI. Giving Birth to a New Identity: Initiation

## (YT, pp. 16-19)

The teachers pointing to the Truth call it "initiation" because it bestows divine knowledge and destroys sin.

***—Hari-Bhakta-Vilâsa* (2.9)**

## Main Points



Michelangelo's Adam, receiving spiritual transmission from the Creator

**1.** Authentic spiritual initiation (*dîkshâ*) has for millennia been a cornerstone of Yoga. There are exceedingly few realizers (who we know of) who reportedly achieved high attainments without initiation. If true, transmission presumably occurred in a previous life.

**2.** In considering initiation, we need to look at both *form* and *substance*. Initiation can occur formally by means of rituals and other exoteric symbols, or it can be mind-to-mind transmission from an adept to a sincere, qualified aspirant (*adhikârin)*. Religious institutions (formal lineages or *paramparâs*) typically uphold external forms of initiation. But genuine, substantial initiation can also occur outside the boundaries of a tradition. In that case, it is a wholly "spiritual" affair (see YT, pp.17-18).

**3.** *Paramparâs* (disciplic successions or lineages) are established by great realizers to ensure the continuation of authentic spiritual teachings. Ideally, a disciplic succession is a link of perfected beings with whom the aspirant will connect through the medium of initiation. Such connection is deemed a blessing and empowerment. Realistically, not all teachers in a given historical succession, or lineage, will have achieved the same level of attainment. But since realized masters are present even without embodiment, there is a certain guarantee that teachings will be preserved. Sometimes, of course, succession is broken, and unless a great teacher of that lineage reincarnates to renew the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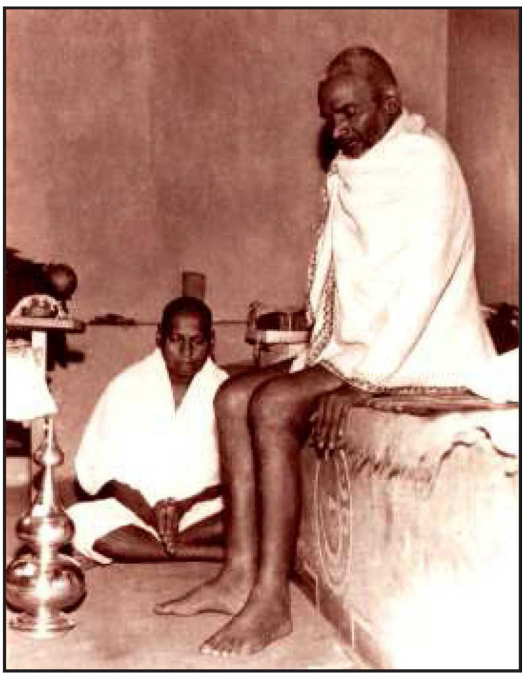
teachings, the particular lineage will become extinct as a line of transmission. Many of the more institutionalized schools appoint an *âcârya* (preceptor or spiritual head) to maintain the integrity of the teachings. Ideally, the *âcârya* will faithfully adhere to the lineage teachings and act as *guru*, though he or she may not always have realized their full import.



Swami Muktananda sitting at the feet of his *guru* Bhagavan Nityananda

4. The Tantric tradition speaks of *shakti-pâta* or *shakti-sancâra*, the transmission of spiritual power that has a transformative effect on the physical, psychological, and spiritual state of the aspirant. The results of initiation may be temporary or more or less permanent according to the completeness of the transmission imparted.

5. There are various levels of initiation, and various systems understand and label them differently:

   - *Dîkshâ,* or initiation, can refer to a transmission that acts as a catalyst to spiritual development in the form of a mystical experience that opens up the path.
   - There is also initiation into practice, whereby a master empowers a student with a *mantra*, for example, by which he or she can grow through regular personal practice. The *guru* himself or herself must have realization of the practice for it to fructify in the disciple. To engage in a practice without initiation in most cases will not bear the proper fruit.
   - *Dîkshâ* can also refer to the bestowal of a "divine body" (*divya-deha*) or any type of transmission in which one is completely enlightened or liberated.

6. In the following we provide a brief historical overview of the institution of spiritual learning, which can help you put your own study into proper perspective:

   - In the Indus-Sarasvati civilization, we can find traces of an early Yoga, which, in light of the recent archaeological evidence, we may relate to the teachings of the *Vedas*. Here we find that the *guru-kula* (teacher's household) was the primary context in which spiritual education took place during the Vedic era. Students were initiated and instructed in the teachings of the *Vedas* and *Brâhmanas*, focusing on the sacrificial ritualism at the heart of the brahmanical orthodoxy. The *Âranyakas* and *Upanishads,* which were created toward the end of the Vedic era, reflect a move toward renunciation and a more internalized and contemplative approach to spirituality. The Upanishadic discourse records transmissions between father and son, as well as husband and wife. Students were expected to live in the teacher's home and serve him and his family steadfastly for many years. Depending on the moral, intellectual, and spiritual competence of a disciple, the teacher would disclose teachings either at the exoteric or the esoteric level.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- The tradition of Vedânta, which is based on the wisdom of the *Upanishads,* continued the *guru-kula* ideal of the Vedic era. Increasingly, however, the system of Vedânta came to be transmitted in the context of *mathas*, or monasteries. Following the example of the Buddhists, Shankara established four such major seats of learning.
- Gautama the Buddha established a tradition of monasticism. Later Buddhist monastic centers became great seats of learning. The most famous monastic university was Nâlandâ in what is now Bihar, which housed over 10,000 monastics at a time. It was an example of the possible and successful integration of spiritual growth and scholastic learning.
- Like Buddhism, Jainism evolved out of a monastic setting of wandering ascetics. It is helpful to remember that both Buddhism and Jainism were established within early shramanic circles—those groups that were considered "heterodox," or as not accepting the authority of the *Vedas*.

The teacher helps you to become quiet and calm and to be free from your ego trip . . . The teacher is only an instrument to help you open your door.

**—Munishree Chitrabhanu**

Cited in Swami Rama, *Inner Paths* (Honesdale, Penn.: Himalayan International Institute, 1979), p. 40

- In Tantra, spiritual education also occurred largely within the *guru-kula* framework but also in the context of small ascetic groups, perhaps similar to the Vedic *Vrâtyas*.
- Today there are many orthodox spiritual lineages, as well as a number of independent teachers all over the world. On the whole, Westerners are blessed with freely available teachings, but very few seek out formal initiation and training under the guidance of a qualified *guru*. Perhaps more than ever we need to rely on each other in communal *sanghas* as mirrors for our own growth through interpersonal relations.

The ruins of Nâlânda


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# VII. Crazy Wisdom and Crazy Adepts

## (YT, pp. 19-23)

## Main Points

Unnamed naked *avadhûta* with swamis of the Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh

**1.** Crazy wisdom refers to the unconventional means by which some adepts seek to radically undermine the delusions and attachments that keep an unenlightened individual bound to egoic (karmic) patterns. Instances of this unorthodox teaching style can be found in all the world's great religious traditions.

**2.** In the Indic tradition, the "holy fool" who does not follow conventional moral codes is widely called *avadhûta*. The *yogin* as a renouncer, who lives on the periphery of society, naturally tends to challenge the conventional order of things. This tendency to move against the grain is taken to extremes by the *avadhûta*, who opposes both conventional hedonism and puritanism. The conduct of the *avadhûta* is often intentionally or overtly irrational. Thus what may appear to be obscene, hypocritical, comic, or disruptive in the behavior of the *avadhûta* may simply be a spontaneous expression of the crazy adept's profound realization.

**3.** Typical examples of *avadhûtas* are Dattâtreya (see YT, pp. 22-23) and Rishabha. We encounter the latter in the voluminous *Bhâgavata-Purâna* (5.5.29ff.) in which he is said to have moved in society like a blind, deaf, and dumb person. People, this scripture tells us, looked upon him as a madman (*unmâdaka*) or a ghost (*pishâca*). He was constantly being threatened, beaten, and spat upon. People threw rocks and dirt at him, but he had no negative reaction, because he was firmly settled in the contemplation of the Divine. Texts cited in this section of YT that speak about the *avadhûta* in the Indic tradition include the *Mahânirvâna-Tantra, Ashtâvakra-Gîtâ, Avadhûta-*


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*Gîtâ, Avadhûta-Anubhûti, Mârkandeya-Purâna* and the *Siddha-Siddhânta-Paddhati*.

4. The Tibetan tradition also knows of a number of great crazy adepts, notably Milarepa and Drukpa Kunley.
5. Crazy adepts may be genuinely acting out of their "God-intoxication." Some may simply be socially inept or literally mad. Although India's long-standing tradition of ascetism has produced numerous noble masters and great insights, the ascetic culture also is full of self-deception. We therefore need to practice prudence and discernment when examining or encountering the crazy wisdom phenomenon.

Milarepa

## FURTHER READING

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Dowman, Keith, trans. *The Divine Madman: The Sublime Life and Songs of Drukpa Kunley.* Clearlake, Calif.: Dawn Horse Press, 1980.

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Evans-Wentz, W. Y. *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa: A Biography from the Tibetan*. London: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Feuerstein, Georg. *Holy Madness: Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers, and Enlightenment*. Prescott, Ariz.: Hohm Press, 2d ed. 2006. (This edition has important changes and additions.)

Guenther, Herbert V. *The Life and Teaching of Naropa*. London: Open University Press, 1963.

Nalanda Translation Committee and Chogyam Trunpa, trans. *The Life of Marpa the Translator by Tsang Nyon Heruka*. Boulder, Colo.: Prajna Press, 1982.


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## *Comments on Source Reading 2*

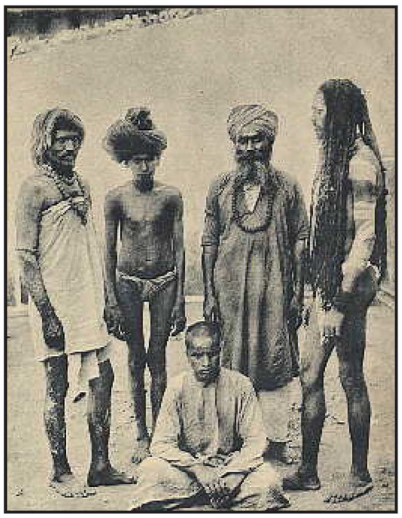
# Siddha-Siddhânta-Paddhati (Selection)

**(YT pp. 24-25)**

Translated by Georg Feuerstein

## Main Points

1. The opening stanza defines the *avadhûta-yogin* as someone who has cast off all conditioning and is free from Nature's binding transformations.
2. The following verses treat the *avadhûta's* few external adornments or actions as symbolic of inner processes, which highlights Yoga's macrocosmic-microcosmic parallelism.
3. The underlying idea expressed here is that for the *avadhûta* the world has become play. Enlightenment ends the compulsion of grim seriousness and the sense of being burdened by life.

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## FOR REFLECTION

**1.** Much of contemporary Yoga, which is of the Hatha-Yoga variety, is lacking the traditional initiation and *guru*/disciple relationship. Do you feel one can achieve the higher realizations of Yoga outside of this traditional mold? If yes, what makes you think so?

**2.** In Patanjali's *Yoga-Sûtra* (1.23-27), there is a discussion of *îshvara,* who is said to be the teacher of all *yogins*. Consider what this means or what might have prompted Patanjali to put forward his particular version of theism?

**3.** In traditional societies, a name is considered a source of power and as being imbued with special significance. Initiates are given a new name in recognition of their spiritual rebirth. Does your name hold any significance for you? How does it relate to your sense of identity?

## REMEMBER

As we noted before, we recommend that you write your responses to "For Reflection" and also to the Homework questions in your notebook. Many students have found this very helpful in assimilating yogic ideas and making them relevant to their daily life and spiritual practice.


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# QUESTIONNAIRE #3

Please SUBMIT this questionnaire to TYS: tyslearning@sasktel.net
Don't forget to include your full name, email address, date, and course title. Please refer to our instructions on p. 17.

**1. Which of the following are significant functions of the guru?** *(check one or more)*

(a) to please the disciple
(b) to please himself or herself
(c) to instruct the disciple in the yogic teachings
(d) to engage in spiritual transmission for the benefit of the disciple
(e) to hold the disciple accountable for his or her actions
(f) to be like a parent to the disciple
(g) to spiritually awaken the disciple

**2. What is the principal role of a *sad-guru*?** *(check one or more)*

(a) to teach
(b) to simply be present as pure Awareness
(c) to voice the yogic tradition
(d) to enter into the *samâdhi* state

**3. What is meant by *adhikâra*?** *(check one)*

(a) authority
(b) authenticity
(c) competence
(d) self-transcendence
(e) service

**4. Are spiritual teachers required to accept any student who approaches them?** *(check one)*

(a) yes
(b) no


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**5. Who is Dakshinamûrti?** *(check one)*

(a) Brahma
(b) Vishnu
(c) Shiva

**6. Which of the following applies to a *sad-guru*?** *(check one)*

(a) *jîvan-mukta*
(b) liberation after death
(c) has climbed the ladder of ecstasy up to *nirvikalpa-samâdhi*
(d) has to remain in *samsâra* for only one more lifetime

**7. What is *guru-yoga*?** *(check one)*

(a) practicing Yoga as received from one's teacher
(b) ritual worship of the teacher
(c) honoring the teacher
(d) making the teacher the object of all one's spiritual endeavors

**8. Is it correct to say that because Yoga means "union," Yoga rejects all innovation?** *(check one and please explain your choice)*

(a) yes
(b) no

Well pleased with devotees who, through many lives, worship [Him] constantly with profound devotion according to the Vedic rules, the Ruler (*îsha*) himself, the Lord—out of compassion—instantaneously assumes the form of a blessed preceptor in space [and time] and properly reveals Reality (*tattva*), so that they [can] cross over the ocean of suffering that is cyclic existence (*samsâra*).

**—Shankara**
*Guru-Stotra* (1)


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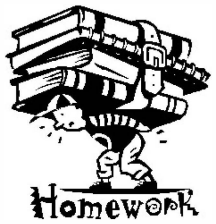
# LESSON 4

## I. Objectives

This lesson has the following two objectives:

- to help you grasp the essential features of the diverse branches of Yoga
- to introduce you to Jnâna-Yoga, the path of discriminating wisdom

## II. Homework Assignments




- **Read** sections I–IV of Chapter 2 in *The Yoga Tradition* book (pp. 27–36), including Source Reading 3 (*Amrita-Bindu-Upanishad)*.
- **Read,** along with the above readings in YT, all sections in Lesson 4 of this Study Guide, including the Additional Source Reading and Additional Study Materials #13–15.
- **Ponder** the questions under "For Reflection" and jot down your significant thoughts.
- **Answer Questionnaire #4 and submit.**
- **Practical Assignment:** Practice for at least one whole day being the witness of all your actions, feelings, and thoughts. For at least three practice sessions, use Ramana Maharshi's meditation technique "Who am I?" Then wait and listen in silence to your innermost self. As you sit quietly, periodically ask yourself the same question and again wait and listen. See what arises in your mind.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## III. Introductory Remarks

This lesson deals with the basics of the teachings of Yoga. If you are new to Yoga, then it is especially worthwhile to pay close attention to the concepts introduced on the following pages. If you are somewhat aquainted with Yoga, consider this lesson a refresher course. You may even discover some new ideas. In any case, please don't speed read but favor a thoughtful approach, which allows you to assimilate the contents of this lesson. After all, you are not participating in this course merely to be able to rattle off facts and figures but to **grow inwardly**. At least, this is a major purpose of this distance-learning course.

Apart from furnishing an overview of the principal approaches of Yoga, Lesson 4 focuses on the path of Jnâna-Yoga, which is based on the nondualist metaphysics of Vedânta. If you don't know what this means, you will soon find out. Jnâna-Yoga is a key orientation within the ramified tradition of Hindu Yoga. Many of India's greatest sages and saints have been exponents of Jnâna-Yoga. If you have understood the principles of this Yoga, you will also be able to understand the philosophical framework of most other forms of Yoga.

With the exception of Patanjali's Classical Yoga, as expounded in the *Yoga-Sûtra,* all branches of Yoga subscribe to one or the other type of nondualist philosophy. There are, however, many variations, which must be carefully distinguished. Not infrequently, those who are only half informed think that all nondualist schools in India subscribe to the philosophy taught by Shankara, the great eighth-to-ninth-century Vedânta teacher. This is not the case.

It is good for beginning students to realize right away that India has produced the most amazingly diversified spiritual and philosophical heritage of the world. It will take time to orient yourself in this veritable jungle of systems and ideas, but *The Yoga Tradition* and this Study Guide were designed to make this complexity accessible to the non-specialist.

We all approach reality differently, depending on our life experiences and understanding. Similarly, the sages and thinkers of India have formulated their philosophical systems in light of their own experiences—including so-called mystical experiences—and their reasoning power, as well as their ideas about what a person should do to achieve lasting happiness. Theirs are not merely abstract systems or ideologies but philosophies in the true sense: They are intended to furnish practical answers to the big existential questions: Who am I? What must I do? You might want to bear this in mind when studying the many ideas presented in this course.

To appreciate nondualist metaphysics, please study particularly my rendering of the *Amrita-Bindu-Upanishad* found in *The Yoga Tradition* (YT, pp. 34-36). This short text might lead you to a better understanding of the nondualist orientation within Yoga and Hinduism in general.


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# The Wheel of Yoga

## (YT, pp. 27-58)

## I. Overview

### (YT, pp. 27-28)

### Main Points

1. Yoga has its historical roots in the spirituality of the Indus-Sarasvati (or Vedic) civilization. The *Vedas*, which were the guiding light of this archaic civilization, are the common spiritual heritage of all orthodox (*astika*) Indian traditions, sacred and secular. Yogic ideas and practices derive from this body of sacred knowledge.

Indus seal featuring a bull, or what is sometimes called a unicorn

2. The *Upanishads* form the concluding portions of the Vedic revelation. The Upanishadic teachings elucidate and develop the esoteric/metaphysical teachings of the *Vedas* and emphasize realization of *brahman*, the transcendental ground of existence, by means of meditation (see the section on Uttara-Mîmâmsâ in YT, pp. 74-75 and the comments in SG thereon). In the *Upanishads*, we find the first technical use of the word *yoga* in the sense of "spiritual discipline" and also the clear incorporation of key yogic practices and thought.

3. The Vedic revelation (*shruti*), begins with four hymnodies called *samhitâs* ("collections") and concludes with the esoteric teachings of the *Upanishads*. This body of revealed knowledge—from the Vedic *Samhitâs* to the *Upanishads*—contains the seeds of concepts and practices central to the many forms of Yoga that we will review here. Among them are:

   - law of moral causation (*karma*)
   - moral law (*dharma*)
   - rebirth (*punar-janman*)
   - morally sound action (*shubha-karman*)


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- meditation (*dhyâna, nididhyâsana*)
- sacred sound (*mantra*)
- breathwork (*prânâyâma*)
- ascetism (*tapas*)
- renunciation (*samnyâsa*)

When a person lacks understanding and the mind remains uncontrolled, then the senses are disobedient like bad horses for a charioteer.

But when a person has understanding and the mind is always controlled, then the senses are obedient like good horses for a charioteer.

***—Katha-Upanishad* (3.5-6)**

**4.** The "Wheel of Yoga" (see YT, p. 27) is a pedagogical aid for discussing the major branches of Hindu Yoga that developed out of the early Vedic teachings over many centuries. The diagram in *The Yoga Tradition* names eight branches, but Kriyâ-Yoga (path of self-transcending ritual activity) and Samnyâsa-Yoga (path of renunciation) are not really significant branches in their own right, though ritual and renunciation are important yogic means. We therefore propose a new wheel comprising only seven spokes representing the following branches of Hindu Yoga:

- Râja-Yoga — the "Royal Yoga" of Patanjali
- Hatha-Yoga — the "Forceful Yoga" of self-transcendence via the body
- Jnâna-Yoga — the path of wisdom
- Bhakti-Yoga — the path of devotion
- Karma-Yoga — the path of self-transcending action
- Mantra-Yoga — the path of sacred sounds
- Tantra-Yoga — the path of integration (including Kundalinî-Yoga and Laya-Yoga)

**5.** Each branch represents a self-contained approach to liberation, emphasizing distinct techniques and ideas. This diversity also demonstrates the adaptive and accommodating nature of Yoga, which takes into account the various personality types and individual karmic inclinations.

This diagram is meant to replace the one in YT, p. 27, which does not mention Tantra-Yoga but has Samnyâsa-Yoga and Kriyâ-Yoga (which is a Tantric Yoga)


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## II. Râja-Yoga: The Resplendent Yoga of Spiritual Kings

**(YT, pp. 28-29)**

Râja-Yoga ("Royal Yoga") is the name given to the Yoga system of the reputed author of the *Yoga-Sûtra*. His system is also referred to as *darshana* ("view of Yoga") or Classical Yoga and is often characterized as the path of meditation. This system is dealt with in greater depth in the distance-learning course entitled ***Classical Yoga*****,** which is available from TYS**.**

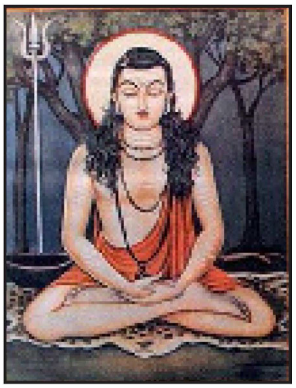
Patanjali

## III. Hatha-Yoga: Cultivating an Adamantine Body

**(YT, pp. 29-31)**

Hatha-Yoga, known as the "forceful way," is a path of radical psycho-physical transformation aimed at constructing an immortal "divine body" (*divya-sharîra*) as a feature of full Self-realization. Hatha-Yoga has deep affiliations with Tantra-Yoga, and its techniques have been adopted by many schools of Tantra. This branch of Hindu Yoga is dealt with at some length in Chapter 18 of *The Yoga Tradition*.

Traditional Hatha-Yoga is a sophisticated *spiritual* approach, which has very little in common with modern endeavors going by the same name. For contemporary Hatha-Yoga to truly serve the deeper (spiritual) needs



Goraksha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of its practitioners, we feel it must be revitalized by an encounter with traditional sources—be they teachers or texts. Our treatment is meant to contribute toward such a realignment of contemporary Hatha-Yoga with the authentic Indian tradition. There are only a few Hatha-Yoga schools—notably (but by no means exclusively) Iyengar Yoga, Viniyoga, Sivananda Yoga, and the Tantric Yoga of Bihar School of Yoga—that have preserved the vital link to tradition. The teachings of Tantra are dealt with in more detail in Chapter 17 of *The Yoga Tradition*.

## IV. Jnâna-Yoga: Seeing with the Eye of Wisdom

**(YT, pp. 31-33)**

I am neither the doer nor the enjoyer.
Actions have I none, now or then.
I have no body, nor am I bodiless.
How can there be "mine" and "not mine"?

I have no flaws like attachment,
Nor any suffering arising from embodiment.
Know me to be the singular Self,
As vast as space itself.

—*Avadhûta-Gîtâ* (*1.66-67*)

Translated from the original Sanskrit
by Georg Feuerstein

Swami Gnanananda Thapovanam
(died 1974)

### Main Points

**1.** Jnâna-Yoga is the path of mindfulness, or awareness, aimed at realizing the transcendental oneness (*ekatva*) of all things. In many ways. In some of its approaches, it reflects the verticalist trend favored by those schools that are based on nondual Vedanta (see the section


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on Uttara-Mîmâmsâ in the Study Guide, Chapter 4). In its most advanced form, however, it represents an integral teaching. Among the most well-known and influential exponents of Jnâna-Yoga are Shankara (7th-9th A.D.), Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, and Swami Gnanananda (all 20th century).

According to Vedânta, there are four fundamental states of consciousness: waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and the "fourth" dimension (*turîya*). *Turîya* is the transcendental Awareness (*cit*) beyond all empirical states and is equivalent to *jnâna*, or liberating wisdom, and Self-realization.

**2.** The word *jnâna* is cognate with the Greek term *gnosis*, indicating a liberating knowledge or intuition. In this approach, Self-Realization is achieved through discernment (*viveka*) between the Real and the unreal. This process is aided by the quality of dispassion (*vairâgya*). The rationale of Jnâna-Yoga is that we are innately perfect, whole, and complete. Discernment and dispassion are but means to awaken us to that truth. In this metaphysical understanding, the core of one's own being is seen as identical with the ground of the universe. Maxims such as "I am the Absolute" (*aham brahma asmi*) and "You are That" (*tat tvam asi*) capture the spirit of Jnâna-Yoga.

**3.** In the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, Jnâna-Yoga is related to Buddhi-Yoga. The term *buddhi* in this context refers to the organ of wisdom, the higher mind, which can lead us to liberation. It is a term familiar to both Yoga and Sâmkhya. The *Gîtâ* states that Jnâna-Yoga is the path followed by the adherents of the Sâmkhya tradition, which involves withdrawal from active life. The *Gîtâ*, however, comes out in favor of Karma- and Bhakti-Yoga. Krishna favors the notion of creative participation in the world rather than rejection of socioreligious duties as practiced in Jnâna-Yoga. Yet, the *Gîtâ* accepts that both approaches lead to the same ultimate attainment of Self-realization.

**4.** *Jîvanmukti*, living liberation, is a central theme in Jnâna-Yoga. It is also the goal of Hatha-Yoga and Tantra, which seek "this-worldly" liberation through the transformation of the body/mind into a fully conscious vehicle. In Jnâna-Yoga, *jîvan-mukti* is achieved by resting as the transcendental Witness (*sâkshin*), which amounts to a complete and irreversible transcendence of identification with the finite body-mind. By contrast, some schools of Hindu spirituality insist that liberation occurs only when the body is dropped at the time of death, which is the ideal of disembodied liberation (*videha-mukti*).

Vidyâranya teaching a group of disciples

**5.** The *Jîvan-Mukti-Viveka* of Vidyâranya, comprising five chapters (totaling 173 pages in the printed edition), extols and expounds in lucid terms the ideal of *jîvan-mukti*. According to him, the *jîvan-mukta* is steadfast in wisdom (*sthita-prajnâ*), beyond the influence of the three fundamental modes of Nature (*guna-atîta*), and beyond the experience of pleasure and pain and the grip of karmic traits (*vâsanâ*). In support, Vidyâranya cites a variety of traditional authorities, and, in the process, furnishes a Vedântic commentary on some of the aphorisms of Patanjali's *Yoga-Sûtra* and the *Paramahamsa-Upanishad*. Vidyâranya was a former prime minister of King Bukka Râya


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of Vijayanâgara, who lived in the fourteenth century. He was known as Sâyana prior to becoming a renouncer (*samnyâsin*) and has many other works to his credit.

**6.** Sadânanda's *Vedânta-Sâra* ("Essence of Vedânta"), a mid-fifteenth-century text, maps out a fourfold path of Jnâna-Yoga. This work is considered one of the favorite manuals of Vedânta and has had many commentaries written on it, notably the *Subodhinî* by Nrisimha Sarasvatî, the *Bâla-Bodhinî* by Apo Deva, and the *Vidvân-Manorama-Anjani* by Râma Tîrtha (a disciple of Krishna Tîrtha and the *guru* of Madhusudâna Sarasvatî). Sadânanda Yogîndra belonged to the Sarasvatî Order of Shankara's school. His *guru* was Advayânanda Sarasvatî and his main disciple was Krishnânanda Sarasvatî (16th century A.D.).

Goddess Tripurâ

## The Tripura-Rahasya

The *Tripura-Rahasya* ("Secret of the Triple City"), a late medieval Shâkta work authored by Haritâyana (hence also called *Haritâyana-Samhitâ*), contains valuable information regarding the path of Jnâna-Yoga. This text, comprising 22 chapters with a total of 2,177 verses, was one of Ramana Maharshi's favorites. Shiva, who is also known as Tripura ("Triple City"), because he destroyed three demons who lived in three invincible fortresses. These three—named Târakâksha, Kamalâksha and Vidyunmâlin—were the children of the demon king Târaka. As a result of their fierce penance (*tapas*), Brahma granted them the boon of living for a thousand years in three (*tri*) floating fortresses (*pura*) that could only be destroyed simultaneously. Their evil deeds, which wreaked havoc in the universe, finally prompted Shiva to create a weapon that set the fortresses on fire at the same time, ending the reign of terror. Shiva is the spouse of Goddess Tripurâ. Another traditional explanation of Goddess Tripurâ's name is that it reflects her triple nature as a maiden, mature woman, and post-menopausal woman.


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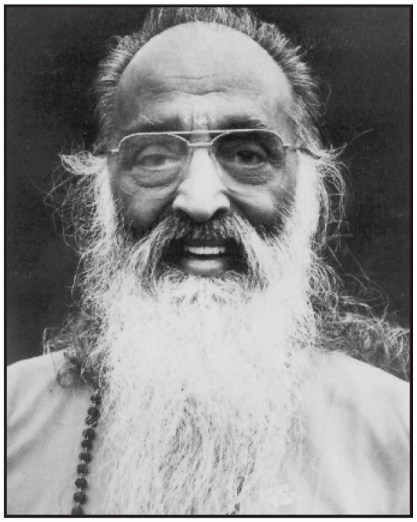
**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #13**

# Jnâna-Yoga: The Path of Wisdom

by Georg Feuerstein

Jnâna-Yoga is the path of insight or wisdom. Such insight, however, is not knowledge as commonly understood, but a higher or metaphysical type of illuminative knowledge, which has been called "gnosis" by some scholars. The scriptures of Vedânta distinguish between a higher knowledge (*jnâna*) and a lower knowledge (*vijnâna*). The former pertains to the organ of wisdom (*buddhi*). The latter is a product of the brain-dependent "mind," which functions as a processing plant for the input from the senses. This "lower" mind is known in the Sanskrit language as *manas,* the instrument of thought. The *buddhi* is that aspect of our being which is natively like a limpid pool and capable of reflecting the light of the Self, the esoteric "Sun."



Swami Chinmayananda, a contemporary teacher of Jnâna-Yoga (Vedânta)

The *âtman* is described as being self-luminous, whereas all finite objects, including the *buddhi,* depend for their visibility on the transcendental "Light." To employ a modern metaphor: The *âtman's* radiance is comparable to the bright light emitted by the high-powered lamp of a lighthouse. That light is reflected in the Fresnel lens surrounding the source of light; the lens corresponds to the *buddhi*. The area beyond the lighthouse is progressively darker—an image that depicts very well the dimness into which the material body and the physical world as a whole are plunged. In more literal terms, the cosmos is a fabric woven of light and darkness. Some cosmic structures (black holes) even trap light by curving space-time itself. And yet, as some astrophysicists conjecture, on the other side of black holes are white holes emitting intense light.

The yogic work consists in spotting the beacon, drawing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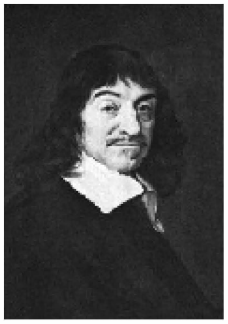
closer and closer to it, until we realize that the source of light beyond the *buddhi's* Fresnel lens is our essential nature. In the moment of that realization, we *become* the source of light only to find that we are also the world beyond the light tower. We are the source of light, Fresnel lens, lighthouse, the cliff upon which the lighthouse stands, the vast ocean beyond it, and indeed all the visible and invisible realms of the unimaginably vast universe. Such is the glory of spiritual enlightenment. It surpasses by astronomical magnitudes the so-called "enlightenment" of rationalists like Descartes.

Fresnel lens

Guided by his trusted reason, Descartes arrived at a concept of God and the world that few today take seriously. For him, God was the great mechanic who fashioned the universe like a clock, wound it up, and then, satisfied with his handiwork, watched the world's progress through the ages. This kind of deism makes no allowance for the mystical impulse in us. There is no spiritual poetry in Descartes' philosophy by which we could rise to the recognition of the Divine as our home. God is forever apart from his creatures.



"Cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am)
—Descartes

By contrast, the key message of Vedânta is that there is no gulf between the Divine and the world and that to assume such a separation is a distortion of the truth, in fact the root cause of our individual and collective experience of suffering *(duhkha)*. On the contrary, the Vedânta philosophers and sages proclaim that our happiness lies in the discovery that there is no unbridgeable chasm between the Divine**,** or ultimate Reality, and us: The Divine is our true identity beyond all the many personae that we play out in daily life.

According to most schools of this Hindu tradition, our perception of a universe rich in distinct forms and beings is a distortion of the truth. In reality, those multiple forms and beings are all appearances or forms of one and the same Being, called *brahman* or *âtman*. The term *jnâna-yoga* is first mentioned in the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (3.3). Here the God-man Krishna declares that he has since time immemorial taught two ways of life—Jnâna-Yoga for the *sâmkhyas* and Karma-Yoga ("Yoga of action") for the *yogins*. In this context, a *sâmkhya* is not so much an adherent of the classical Sâmkhya school of thought as a practitioner of wisdom, a traveler on the path of illumination, a *jnânin*. Krishna equates *jnâna-yoga* with *buddhi-yoga*.

As we have seen, the *buddhi* is the faculty of wisdom, the higher mind in which the primary quality of *sattva* predominates. *Sattva* means literally "being-ness" or "real-ness." It is the principle of lucidity, which is present to one degree or another in all things and beings. But it predominates in the *buddhi,* which is both a level of existence and an elevated mental function. Every conceivable phenomenon, whether on the physical level or in other dimensions of cosmic existence, is the product of the interplay of the three primary forces of Nature (*prakriti*): *sattva, rajas,* and *tamas***.** The *buddhi* is deemed the very first and purest product of the process of evolution by which forms and beings are manifested on various levels of existence. It is the organ of wisdom in which, among other things, the impulse to liberation arises.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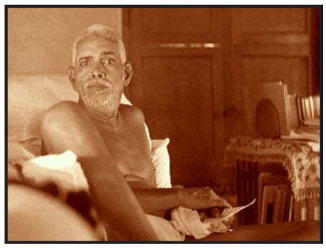
Just as important as discrimination and renunciation is the desire for liberation (*mumukshutva*), without which there can be no Self-realization. Although Sadânanda and other authorities of Vedânta explain *mumukshutva* as the "desire (*icchâ*) for liberation," it is really not so much a desire as a reorientation of one's whole being toward the ultimate Reality. It is the will to receive the revelation of gnosis (*jnâna*), in which the narrow ego-sense is absent and in which the world and our body-mind glow as the all-comprising singular Reality.

## ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #14

# Yoga of Discernment

by Georg Feuerstein



Ramana Maharshi

Self-realization—the recovery of our true identity as the *âtman*—depends on applying discernment to everything that is presenting itself to our conscious awareness, realizing that whatever is an object of consciousness is necessarily not the Self, which is the unsurpassable or transcendental Subject. The classic process of this *via negativa* is epitomized in the insight "I am not this" (*idam na aham*[1]), "I am not that" (*tan na aham*[2]). The formulaic expression of this method is *neti-neti*[3] ("not thus, not thus"), which was first taught in the early *Upanishads*, the esoteric or gnostic scriptures concluding the Vedic revelatory literature.

To this classic process the modern Indian sage Ramana Maharshi provided a complementary approach in the contemplative question "Who am I?" Whereas the former process focuses on the object of consciousness and its unreal (not necessarily illusory) quality, the latter approach has the transcendental Subject as its direct target. For when we inquire "Who am I?" we are inevitably led to a series of perceptions about ourselves, which we recognize to be limited and therefore not indicative of our true identity. Thus "Who am I?" might give rise to the notion that we are our body, but upon closer inspection we realize that this is not the case, that consciousness is not inevitably bound up with our physical existence. Or we might think that we are the mind, but then, again, upon closer inspection, we recognize that the mind too is merely a superimposition upon the transcendental Self, which is pure Being-Consciousness quite free from thought or emotion. Deep self-inquiry in the form that Ramana Maharshi taught gradually reveals to us our various layers of habitual misidentification: "I am of a certain gender, race, age, nationality with such and such a social and educational background," etc. If we persist in the exercise of radical self-inquiry ("Who am I?"), the sage of South India assured us, we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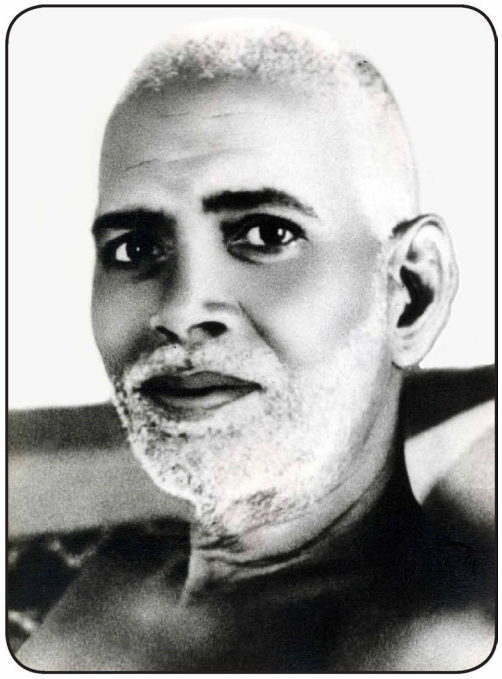
will discover our true identity.

During this process of meditative self-inspection—called *âtma-vicâra* in Sanskrit—we auto-matically, if step by step, transcend ourselves. The fact that self-transcendence is even possible indicates that Consciousness exceeds our biological and mental-psychological conditioning. If self-transcendence is so natural to our being, why does it appear to be so difficult? The simple answer is that our conditioning to identify not with our true Self but instead with any number of substitute identities is extraordinarily strong and requires a powerful sustained effort to be overcome. We must dismantle our misidentifications as we become progressively aware of them, not merely once but over and over again until this new habit of discernment (*viveka*) is firmly established. Then, regardless of the circumstance, we can remain in a witnessing disposition instead of losing ourselves in our habit patterns.



Ramana Maharshi's peaceful gaze drew many of his visitors into a state of inner calm or even temporary transcendence of the body-mind

The discovery of the Self as the witness (*sâkshin*) of all mental contents—whatever the level or state of consciousness—is a most important event in our life as spiritual practitioners. This witnessing is not merely an intellectual activity, for the intellect is transcended in the process of witnessing. Rather it is a tentative or, when the process has fulfilled itself, the actual and permanent recovery of our Self-Identity.

The Yoga of witnessing is Buddhi-Yoga, the path of wisdom through which we perceive and overcome our habitual and therefore binding (karmic) patterns of thought and behavior. The term *buddhi* stems from the same verbal root (*budh*) as *bodha* meaning "enlightenment/awakening" and *buddha* ("awakened"). Thus when wisdom dawns in us, our sense of identity shifts from the body and mind and the external world to the witnessing Self. To the degree that this shift has occurred within us we are free. This inner freedom from our karmic conditioning coincides with our realization of undiluted happiness or bliss (*ânanda*), which, like Being and Consciousness, is a hallmark of the transcendental Self.

Self-realization is the end of all suffering (*duhkha*). This is the highest human objective. We are not born to suffer. Suffering is merely a function of our spiritual ignorance (*avidyâ*), which occludes our innermost identity, the *âtman*.

When we have realized the *âtman*, then the body, the mind, and the world at large cease to be objects for us. We recognize them as our very Self. Then our Self-vision (*âtma-darshana*) encircles everything. We realize ourselves as the ultimate Essence and Foundation of all beings and things. Yet we no longer fixate on particular beings and things—i.e., on a particular body, mind, or world—as demarcating our being.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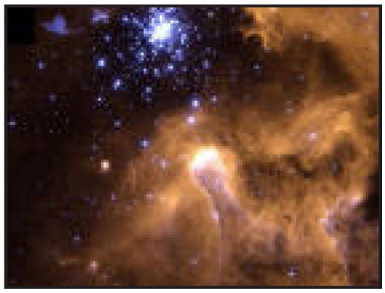

We see through all eyes; we hear through all ears; we breathe through every breathing being in the universe; we illuminate every single mind; we shine in and as every star; and we also are spread out infinitely in the interstices between galaxies and even between the infinite universes that constitute the cells of our space-transcending, time-transcending Being-Consciousness (*sac-cid*).

*Tat tvam asi!* That art thou!

### Notes

1. The phrase *idam na aham* is written in Sanskrit *idam nâham*.
2. The phrase *tan na aham* is written in Sanskrit *tannâham*.
3. *Neti* is composed of two words, namely *na* ("not") and *iti* ("thus")—"not thus."

## Comments on Source Reading 3

## Amrita-Bindu-Upanishad

### (YT, pp. 34-36)

## Main Points

**1.** The karmically conditioned mind is the cause of bondage. Therefore, in order to realize the Self, we must purify the mind.

**2.** According to the *Amrita-Bindu-Upanishad,* this mental or inner purification is effected by the mind becoming devoid of objects (3, 4) and being held within (4). Thus the mind becomes a tool for its own dissolution (5). The use of sound (*svara*) and the knowledge of the sonic Absolute (*shabda-brahman*) (17), as well as employing the eye of wisdom to see beyond the vision of separateness, are suggested to the aspirant (21). These are pathways to realizing the Imperishable (*akshara*)—the Absolute beyond sound, form, and speculation. At first, verses 3-5 place the Absolute above and beyond the world of physical and mental experience. Subsequently (18-21), the seeker is told to see this Reality directly, penetrating through the notion of duality, with a transcendent perception of the

Poonjaji, a *jnâna-yogin*


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phenomenal.

**3.** All that remains in the state of pure Awareness is the Self itself—free of the conceptual mind, which is concerned with distinctions and subject to distractions—the one unitary Being, which is the essential nature of the "Many" (8, 22). For one who has transcended the three states of waking, dreaming, and sleeping (through such realization), there is no rebirth (11). For further historical information on Jnâna-Yoga, examine Uttara-Mîmâmsâ (Vedânta) and especially the section on Shankara in SG, Lesson 4.

## Yoga of Discernment

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #15**

## Mindfulness: How to Develop Witnessing

by Georg Feuerstein

> So habitual is the trance of ordinary life that one could say that human beings are a race that sleeps and awakens, but does not awaken fully. Because half-awake is sufficient for the tasks we customarily do, few of us are aware of the dysfunction of our condition.
>
> **—Arthur J. Deikman, *The Observing Self,* p. 129**

"Mindfulness" is a mind full of attentiveness. Attentiveness happens spontaneously when there is a moment of alarm, when we are startled into involuntary alertness. Then our attention becomes acutely focused on the object or situation that causes us to be alarmed. Our nervous system automatically clicks into the flight-or-fight mode. Mindfulness proper, however, is a type of attentiveness that occurs only when we are relaxed, or serene, rather than alarmed or feeling threatened. It is the nonjudgmental, noninterpretative witnessing of the activities of the body and the mind.


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The concept of mindfulness is most commonly associated with Buddhism where mindfulness pertains to the seventh limb of the Buddha's eightfold path and is known as "right remembering" (*samyak-smriti*). It is not, however, exclusive to Buddhism and is a mental discipline leading to and underlying the yogic practice of concentration. (For a detailed account of the Buddhist meditation stages, see the treatment by the Sri Lankan meditation master Henepola Gunaratna.)

Jiddu Krishnamurti characterized mindfulness as "choiceless awareness," while others have referred to it as "bare attention." This suggests that it has no ideological coloring, no conceptual overlay. As the German-born Theravada Buddhist master Nyanaponika Thera explained:

> By bare attention we understand the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens *to* us and *in* us, at the successive moments of perception. It is called "bare" because it attends to the bare facts of a perception without reacting to them by deed, speech or mental comment. Ordinarily, that purely receptive state of mind is . . . just a very brief phase of the thought process of which one is often scarcely aware. But in the methodical development of mindfulness aimed at the unfolding of its latent powers, bare attention is sustained for as long a time as one's strength of concentration permits. (Cited in Jonathan Spear, ed., *The Experience of Meditation*, pp. 133-134)

As a discipline, mindfulness must be sustained and therefore sufficiently acute ("ardent"), which requires cultivation through repeated effort. Gradually, the mind learns to stay with the task at hand.

Awareness is a fundamental aspect of the mind. Yet, much of our life unfolds in a dimly aware or even unaware state of consciousness. In the spiritual traditions, this "consensus trance" (Arthur Deikman, Charles Tart) is considered undesirable, as the mind is allowed to enter into merely reactive patterns that perpetuate themselves. Reactive patterns typically involve unwholesome mental activity, especially negative drives and emotions, which set up chain reactions that occlude the faculty of awareness. From a Buddhist perspective, lack of attentiveness is responsible for the creation of unwholesome karma, that is, the creation of a mental thrust toward insalubrious states of mind and experiences and the reduction of inner freedom.

Mindfulness, or sustained nonjudgmental attentiveness, by contrast engenders wholesome karma, which is expressed in greater equanimity and a greater sense of inner freedom. In turn, these are trustworthy foundations for insight (prajnâ) into the nature of things, leading to benign attitudes and a harmonious life.

Above all, mindfulness interrupts the automatic process of becoming lost in one's mental processes, of wrongly identifying oneself with one's inner activities. As any beginner in the art of concentration and meditation quickly discovers, the mind is largely on automatic. Thoughts and emotions seem to perpetuate themselves in us, even when we would like them to stop. After just a few seconds of conscious self-observation, we find ourselves lost again in our own thoughts. Also,


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more fatefully, we typically identify with strong unpleasant emotions, such as anger or jealousy, and thereby give tacit permission to those emotions to run their cause, sometimes to a person's utter ruin.

Through the discipline of mindfulness, we can prevent such reactivity. In other words, we can learn to gain control over our mind's automaticity, which is connected with the brain and nervous system.

Mindfulness can be formal or informal. That is to say, it can be practiced in a special contemplative session; or it can be engaged as an aspect of one's daily activities. Ideally, to maximize the benefit of this kind of voluntary attentiveness, mindfulness should be practiced both formally and informally.

Buddhism, which has developed the practice of mindfulness to a fine art, distinguishes four focal points of mindfulness, which are

1. the body as a whole
2. feelings
3. the mind as a whole
4. mental activity

Mindfulness in regard to the body involves being attentive to the body's position in space and movement. For instance, the practitioner of mindfulness notes—always without judgment—whether his body is leaning to one side or the other, sitting upright or collapsed, or whether there is motion of the arms and legs, and so forth. A favored technique is to focus on the movement of the breath. He does not inquire into why the body is behaving the way it is, just as he is not inquiring into the causes of arising mental phenomena. Thus there is no analytical dimension to this exercise of "remembering" (Sanskrit: *smriti*; Pali: *sati*). It can, however, lead to an equally disciplined examination of bodily and mental activity, which in Buddhism is known as "insight" (Sanskrit: *vipashyana*; Pali: *vipassana*).

Mindfulness in regard to feelings, or sensations, consists in focused attention on bodily sensations, which can be of three varieties: painful/uncomfortable, pleasant/comfortable, and neutral. But the practitioner merely notices when one or the other type of feeling/sensation is present; he does not interpret what this means.

Mindfulness of the mind "in of itself" involves being acutely attentive to the mind, specifically the presence of attachment, aversion, or delusion. Again, beyond this witnessing, no conceptualization is engaged in.

Mindfulness focused on arising mental phenomena, in Buddhism, means attentiveness to the presence or absence of sensual desires, ill will, sloth, drowsiness, restlessness, anxiety, and doubt.

Obviously, the present moment is all-important in the practice of mindfulness. Past and future are irrelevant to this discipline, and therefore the mind is prevented from wandering off into the past or the future. If we are not present here and now, where are we really?


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As the *Dhamma-Pada* (21) declares:

Mindfulness is the path to the deathless;
Heedlessness is the path to death;
The mindful do not die;
But the heedless are as if dead already.

What this stanza from a popular Buddhist work proposes is that mindfulness places us into Mind as it exists prior to all conceptual elaborations and emotional confusions. This primordial Mind is not the conditional brain-mind but our true nature, which the Buddha and subsequent Buddhist masters assure us is immortal. By contrast, when we succumb to "heedlessness," or inattention, we are involuntarily identifying with the brain-mind and thus mortality.

Expressed in a nonmetaphysical manner, mindfulness makes us real; heedlessness stands for semi-aware automaticity, or what Arthur Deikman and others have called "consensus trance." We are free to choose.

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**ADDITIONAL SOURCE READING**

# Nirvâna-Shatka: Six Stanzas on Extinction

by Georg Feuerstein

The *Nirvâna-Shatka* ("Hundred on Extinction") is a well-known didactic poem that is probably wrongly ascribed to Shankara, the great preceptor of radical nondualism (*kevala-advaita*), a particular form of Vedânta. The reference to *nirvâna* in the poem's title may strike one as odd in a Hindu work, but already the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (2.72), composed about the time of Gautama the Buddha, uses the phrase *brahma-nirvâna* or "brahmic extinction" in the sense of dissolution into the transcendental ground of the world. Thus *nirvâna* is not an exclusively Buddhist term, although it is predominantly so.

The fact that this didactic poem, which does not mention *nirvâna* at all, goes by the name *Nirvâna-Shatka* underscores the ideological proximity of radical nondualism to Buddhism, in particular Asanga's Yogâcâra and Vasubandhu's Vijnânavâda. Shankara himself has often been accused of being a crypto-Buddhist. All such scholarly conjectures notwithstanding, the poem is thoroughly Vedântic in its worldview. The refrain "I am of the nature of Awareness and Bliss. I am Shiva. I am Shiva" leaves us in no doubt of the composer's philosophical heritage.

> *Om*. I am not mind[1], higher mind[2], I-maker[3], or memory[4]; not hearing, tongue, smell, or eyes. I also am not ether, air, fire, water, or earth. I am of the nature of Awareness[5] and Bliss[6]. I am Shiva[7]. I am Shiva. (1)
>
> I am not the life force (*prâna*), not knowledge, not the five "winds"[8]; neither the seven elements[9] nor the five casings.[10] I also am not speech, hands, feet, genitals, or rectum. I am of the nature of Awareness and Bliss. I am Shiva. I am Shiva. (2)
>
> I have no hatred or passion, no greed or delusion. I also am without pride and envy, without law and aim, without desire and release. I am of the nature of Awareness and Bliss. I am Shiva. I am Shiva. (3)
>
> I know not good or evil, not pleasure or pain, not *mantra* or sacrificial place, not the *Vedas* or sacrifice. I am neither the enjoyer nor that which is to be enjoyed,


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and also not enjoyment. I am of the nature of Awareness and Bliss. I am Shiva. I am Shiva. (4)

I know neither death nor fear, and belong to no caste. I also am without mother and father; I am even without birth, and without relatives or friends, without teacher or pupil. I am of the nature of Awareness and Bliss. I am Shiva. I am Shiva. (5)

I am free from change, formless. I am omnipresent, ever transcending the senses. I am without liberation and impossible to know. I am of the nature of Awareness and Bliss. I am Shiva. I am Shiva. (6)

The *Nirvâna-Shatka* illustrates the key Vedântic method of *neti neti* ("not thus, not thus"), as first introduced in the early *Upanishads*. By means of this technique spiritual practitioners can distance themselves from everything that is not Reality itself but merely an attribution or superimposition made by the mind. According to Vedânta, the Ultimate Reality is without qualities. Whenever anything is experienced as having qualities, we can be sure that it is not the Ultimate Reality.

Our most prominent confusion consists in attributing to that formless Singularity a specific body and mind. In other words, instead of abiding as that Singularity, we experience ourselves as a body composed of various organs and a mind constituted by many mental factors. This misidentification is the cause of suffering (*duhkha*), and in order to overcome suffering, we constantly hunt after pleasure (*sukha*). In experiencing pleasure, however, we commit the further error of confusing it with the innate bliss (*ânanda*) of the Ultimate Reality. We attribute to our body-mind a consciousness it simply does not possess. Only the Ultimate Reality *is* Awareness. What we experience as consciousness or awareness (*citta*) in the body or through the mind is only an apparition, or a limited reflection of that supreme, limitless Awareness (*cit*).

The diverse schools of Vedânta explain the relationship between the supreme Awareness (*cit*) and the limited mind (*citta*) in different ways. The *Nirvâna-Shatka* seems to articulate the kind of Vedântic metaphysics that regards the limited consciousness or mind and the world it experiences as an illusion (*mâyâ*), though admittedly this term is nowhere used in the poem. That is to say, the world of multiplicity is not what it appears to be but is a construct of the unenlightened mind. Upon enlightenment, the world shines forth in its true nature, which is the formless Singularity transcending space and time.

## Notes

1. The Sanskrit text has *manas*, which is the lower mind, the relay station for the input from the senses (*indriya*).

2. The higher mind, or *buddhi*, corresponds to the ancient Greek notion of *nous*. It is the organ of intellection, intuition, and wisdom. Whereas the *manas* is characterized by a preeminence of the quality (*guna*) of dynamism (*rajas*), the *buddhi* is predominantly composed of the factor of lucidity (*sattva*). It stands for knowledge, wisdom, understanding, cognition.


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3. "I-maker" is a literal rendering of the Sanskrit term *ahamkâra* (from *aham* "I" and *kâra* "maker"). It is the psychic principle of individuation.

4. The Sanskrit text has *citta*, which here stands for memory rather than the mind in general. The differentiation into *citta, manas*, *buddhi,* and *ahamkâra* is typical of Vedânta.

5. Awareness, or *cit*, is not merely a quality of the Ultimate Reality but its very nature. According to the nondualist metaphysics of Vedânta, the Ultimate Reality transcends all forms and qualities and yet can be talked about as Being (*sat*), Awareness (*cit*), and Bliss (*ânanda*). Often *cit* is rendered as "Consciousness."

6. Bliss (*ânanda*) is not a mere experience or state of consciousness. It is simply another word for Ultimate Reality, which goes beyond all limitations and suffering (*duhkha*).

7. Shiva ("Benign one") is one of the many names of the Ultimate Reality. It also appears in the classical Hindu triad, consisting of Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver), and Shiva (the Destroyer). In religious mythology, Shiva is the Supreme as a person who has various human qualities as well as divine attributes.

8. The five "winds" are the five types of life force in the body: *prâna, apâna, samâna, udâna,* and *vyâna*.

9. The seven elements of the body are generally said to be water, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, and semen.

10. The five "casings" (*kosha*) are the physical body or casing composed of food (*anna-maya-kosha*), the casing composed of life force (*prâna-maya-kosha*), the casing composed of mind (*mano-maya-kosha*), the yet more subtle casing composed of intelligence (*vijnâna-maya-kosha*), and the most subtle casing composed of bliss (*ânanda-maya-kosha*). From an ultimate perspective, all these are veils concealing the true Self (*âtman*).

## REMEMBER

As we noted before, we recommend that you write your responses to "For Reflection" and also to the Homework questions in your notebook. Many students have found this very helpful in assimilating yogic ideas and making them relevant to their daily life and spiritual practice.


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## FOR REFLECTION

**1.** Please read "Yoga of Discernment" (Additional Study Materials #16) and then do the following exercise for 15 minutes: Sit in a chair or on the floor with your spine straight. Close your eyes. Then mentally inquire "Who am I?" Listen to the silence and the silence behind the silence. Who or what is this elusive sense of "I" that you feel? If you like the photograph of Ramana Maharshi in YT, p. xv, you might want to gaze at the image of this great master for a while before practicing self-inquiry.

**2.** Some adherents of Vedânta dismiss the world—including the body—as purely illusory, and they tend to treat (illusory) embodiment as a burden and the body as a stumbling block to Self-realization. Consider how this attitude might negatively influence one's health. Also, does this practice make sense for someone who does not have a healthy self-image? Do you think that one should create a healthy self-image first before going about the spiritual work of transcending the ego?

**3.** It is often said that knowledge is a source of power and by this it is usually meant having the ability to influence one's life circumstances. What is the difference between this-worldly knowledge and transcendent wisdom? What is the significance of liberating insight or wisdom to this-worldly affairs?

**4.** Ignorance is referred to as *avidyâ*. Theoretical knowledge is referred to as *vidyâ* or *jnâna*. Experiential or intellectual knowledge is known as *vijnâna*. Transcendent wisdom is known as *para-vidyâ* and *bodhi,* but it is explicitly taught as not an objective form of knowledge, but rather as a state of being or direct experiencing. What classifications of knowledge or insight fit in your perspective? Do you accept the possibility of higher-order knowledge such as insight into the nature of the cosmos through meditation as the Vedic *rishis* claimed for themselves?

**5.** Epistemology is an investigation into the methods of knowing or gaining understanding. What modes of knowing are you aware of?

**6.** Why do you think wisdom has been related to renunciation traditionally? Think about the well-known sayings, "Don't just sit there, do something" and "Don't just do something, sit there." What connection do you perceive between knowing and doing, or spiritual wisdom and action?


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# QUESTIONNAIRE #4

Please SUBMIT this questionnaire to TYS: tyslearning@sasktel.net
Don't forget to include your full name, email address, date, and course title. Please refer to our instructions on p. 17.

**1. Which branch of Yoga focuses on the path of meditation first and foremost?** *(Check one)*

(a) Bhakti-Yoga
(b) Karma-Yoga
(c) Râja-Yoga
(d) Jnâna-Yoga
(e) Mantra-Yoga
(f) Tantra-Yoga
(g) Hatha-Yoga

**2. Which branch of Yoga seeks to create a "divine body"?** *(Check one)*

(a) Bhakti-Yoga
(b) Karma-Yoga
(c) Râja-Yoga
(d) Jnâna-Yoga
(e) Mantra-Yoga
(f) Tantra-Yoga
(g) Hatha-Yoga

**3. To which branch of Yoga does the *Jîvan-Mukti-Viveka*** of Vidyâranya belong**?** *(Check one)*

(a) Bhakti-Yoga
(b) Karma-Yoga
(c) Râja-Yoga
(d) Jnâna-Yoga
(e) Mantra-Yoga
(f) Tantra-Yoga
(g) Hatha-Yoga


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**4. Who or what is Tripura?** *(Check one) <Please note the spelling of "Tripura">*

(a) Krishna
(b) Shiva
(c) a goddess
(d) Ramana Maharshi

**5. Which teacher emphasized the practice of "self-inquiry"?** *(Check one)*

(a) Swami Gnanananda
(b) no teacher in particular but a Vedic tradition
(c) Vidyâranya
(d) Patanjali
(e) God Shiva
(f) Krishna
(g) Ramana Maharshi
(h) Sadânanda

**6. On the path of Jnâna-Yoga, which of the following is deemed the complementary practice to discernment?** *(Check one)*

(a) mindfulness
(b) self-transcendence
(c) renunciation
(d) sound moral action
(e) devotion to the *guru*
(f) the "six accomplishments"

**7. Which of the following texts is considered to be the most popular traditional manual of Hatha-Yoga?** *(Check one)*

(a) *Yoga-Sûtra*
(b) *Gheranda-Samhitâ*
(c) *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*
(d) *Hatha-Yoga-Pradîpikâ*

**8. Which Sanskrit scripture deals with *buddhi-yoga*?** *(Check one)*

(a) *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*
(b) *Yoga-Sûtra*
(c) *Tripura-Rahasya*
(d) *Vedânta-Sâra*


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**9. Which Yoga authority or text compares the psyche (jîva) to omnipresent space?** *(Check one)*

(a) *Yoga-Sûtra*
(b) *Amrita-Bindu-Upanishad*
(c) T. S. Krishnamacharya
(d) Patanjali
(e) Vyâsa

Base your answer solely on the materials of *The Yoga Tradition* and this Study Guide.

**10. Which branch of Yoga is said to favor a dualist metaphysics?** *(Check one)*

(a) Râja-Yoga
(b) Jnâna-Yoga
(c) Hatha-Yoga

**11. What is the connection between Yoga and the Indus-Sarasvati civilization?** *(Check one)*

(a) there is no connection
(b) there is only the slightest connection
(c) we don't know
(d) it is reasonably to assume there is a connection but it is not entirely clear
(e) there is a strong connection

**12. What does the Sanskrit term *buddhi* mean?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) self, ego
(b) wisdom
(c) knowledge
(d) understanding
(e) cognition
(f) Self-realization, or enlightenment


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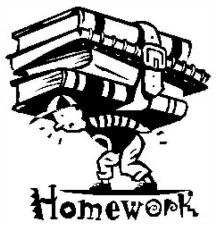
# LESSON 5

## I. Objectives

This lesson has the following two objectives:

- to help you understand the centrality of devotion in many yogic paths
- to introduce you to Bhakti-Yoga, the path of devotional self-surrender

## II. Homework Assignments




- **Read** section V of Chapter 2 in *The Yoga Tradition* book (pp. 36–41).
- **Read** Source Reading 4 (*Bhakti-Sûtra* of Nârada) in *The Yoga Tradition* book (pp. 42–47).
- **Read** all materials of Lesson 5 in this Study Guide, including Additional Study Materials #16 and Additional Source Reading (*Worship Govinda*).
- **Ponder** the questions under "For Reflection" and jot down your significant thoughts.
- **Answer Questionnaire #5 and submit.**
- **Practical Assignment:** Send your blessings to your neighbor, whether or not your neighbor is a likeable individual. Wrap him or her in a bubble of white light, visualizing that this bubble of light will cause all conceivable good things to happen. Realize that your neighbor and you are manifestations of the same universal Reality. Do this exercise for 5 or more minutes on five consecutive days. Then do the same practice vis-à-vis another neighbor or fellow worker also for 5 minutes and on five consecutive days. If you find this exercise too difficult to do in regard to a stranger or a person you find unlikeable, do it first in regard to a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loved family member or friend. If you are having a hard time visualizing a bubble of benign white light, then simply send out your good wishes and thoughts.

## III. Introductory Remarks

Bhakti-Yoga, the focus of this lesson, has a long history. This tells us something about the importance of devotion and devotionalism on the spiritual path. Even approaches that are not expressly devotional can contain devotional elements and practices. Thus, even Jnâna-Yoga, which is often viewed as a nondevotional path, can include a *bhakti* element. For instance, Ramana Maharshi (1875–1950)—a prototypical *jnâna-yogin*—composed several more devotional works in Tamil.

In doing so, Ramana Maharshi followed in the footsteps of Shankara, the great advocate of Vedântic nondualism who likewise has several devotional hymns (*stotra*) to his credit. This shows us that the Hindu tradition does not view Jnâna-Yoga in opposition to *bhakti*.

### Notes

1. *Talks with Ramana Maharshi: On Realizing Abiding Peace and Happiness*, [ed. by Matthew Greenblatt] (Carlsbad, Calif.: Inner Directions Publishing, rev. ed. 2000), p. 8.


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Remember, always read the relevant section in *The Yoga Tradition* book along with this Study Guide, especially our summary of the main points of that section and further elucidating materials.

## V. Bhakti-Yoga: The Self-Transcending Power of Love

**(YT, pp. 36-41)**

Like a cloud drifting in the sky,
Devotion pours down showers of bliss.
He whose mind gets filled like a reservoir
reaps the entire fruit of his birth, none other.

**—Shankara**
*Shivânanda-Lâharî* (76)
Translation by Georg Feuerstein

### Overview

Bhakti-Yoga is the path of the heart. It seeks to transcend the illusory ego-identity (*ahamkâra*) through self-transforming love and service. Bhakti-Yoga, which has its roots in the *Rig-Veda,* emerged as a distinct spiritual path with the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*. This great Yoga text contains many of the core teachings of the devotional approach, subsequently developed into sophisticated teachings especially in the Vaishnava and Shaiva communities. Like *yoga,* the term *bhakti* has many meanings. As devotion is a less familiar topic of study, we will delineate it in more detail on the basis of a range of scriptures and authorities.

Rûpa Gosvâmin

Rûpa Gosvâmin (16th cent. A.D.), a direct disciple of Caitanya (see YT, Chapter 12) posited that love is the animating force in all of life. According to him, at the heart of all existence is the desire to serve, love, and be in relationship. It is the force that integrates all of life in its varied expressions—from the mystical devotion between the psyche (or soul) and God to the creative principle behind Nature and self-expression in art. Bhakti, for Rûpa Gosvâmin, is the superlative means for transcending our condition of suffering (*duhkha*) by channeling our mind and heart toward the Divine. The rationale of Bhakti-Yoga is that we can transform *kâma* into *preman*—selfish desire into selfless love and service to God.


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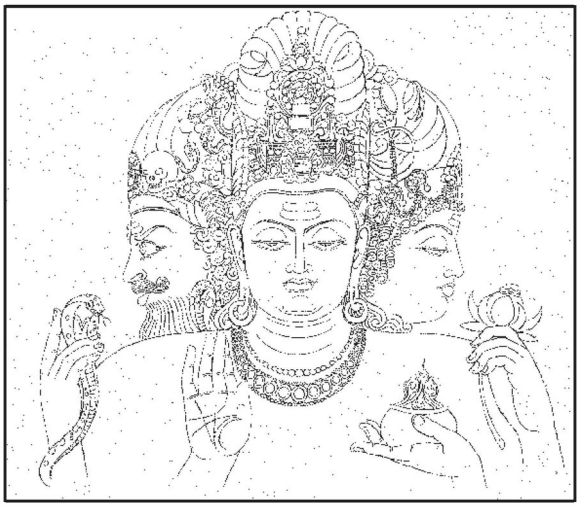
## Main Points



Vishnu
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1. Bhakti-Yoga is another name for the comprehensive tradition of devotionalism also known as *bhakti-mârga*, or the path of devotion, which was developed in the great "sectarian" movements of Vaishnavism (Vishnu worship), Shaivism (Shiva worship), and Shaktism (Shakti/Goddess worship), but also other, minor cults.

2. The Pâncarâtra tradition was an early esoteric monotheistic tradition centering on the worship of God Vishnu-Nârâyana. It was this tradition that proved immensely influential in the history of the *bhakti* movement, notably the development of ritual and temple worship, but also of socioreligious conduct. The term *panca-râtra* means "five nights (*râtra*)," which is often explained as referring to a period of five nights during which Vishnu disseminated the secrets of devotional Yoga to five liberated souls. Other authorities claim that Nârâyana taught his knowledge to Nârada, the author of the *Bhakti-Sûtra*. Evidence in the *Mahâbhârata* and other texts reveals the long history of this tradition whose followers came to be known as Bhâgavatas.

3. In the centuries following (or possibly even coinciding with) the early *Tantras,* the Pâncarâtra tradition created its own scriptural corpus called the *Samhitâs,* such as the *Sâtvata-Samhitâ* and the *Ahirbudhnya-Samhitâ* (c. 800 A.D.).

Krishna and Râdhâ

4. The lovers of the Divine, or devotees (*bhakta*), avail themselves of the energy of emotion, or feeling, channeling it not to finite objects but to the ultimate Object, which is the Divine.

5. The adepts of Bhakti-Yoga believe in an ultimate, unbridgeable dis-tinction between the Divine and finite beings. Thus, their metaphysics is essentially dualistic.

6. In Vaishnavism, the model of nine limbs or stages of *bhakti* is widespread; it corresponds in function and importance to the schema of eight limbs of Classical Yoga. This model is expounded in the *Bhâgavata-Purâna* (9th century A.D.) and represents a sophisticated development of the teachings first articulated in the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (4th-5th century B.C.)


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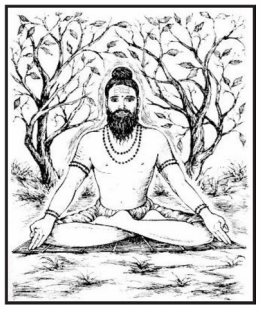
**7.** Bhakti-Yoga was codified in two *Sûtra* compositions; one was composed by Nârada (c. 10th-11th centuries A.D.), the other by Shândilya (9th-10th centuries A.D.).

**8.** The ideal and practice of devotion (*bhakti*) was present already in Vedic times but was not made into a distinct approach until the Shakti or Goddess worship was also present already in the *Rig-Veda,* but was not greatly developed until the epic era and even more so during the evolution of Tantra (starting perhaps c. 300 A.D.).

**9.** In the Shaiva tradition of South India, the *Tiru-Mantiram* of Tirumûlar (700 A.D. or 200-100 B.C.) stands out as a text of Tantric *bhakti*. This tradition and also Vaishnavism are treated in more detail in YT, Chapters 11 and 12.



Tirumûlar

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #16**

# The Depth of Bhakti

by Jagadish Dasa

## Pure Devotion

In Bhakti-Yoga, the answer to human suffering is divine love (*preman*), which is praised as the panacea for the "malady of the heart" (*hrid-roga*)—namely, the cardinal negative emotions of lust (*kâma*), anger (*krodha*), greed (*lobha*), envy (*mâtsarya*), and delusion (*moha*). Devotion is perhaps best described as both mystical emotion and divine cognition. Some forms of devotion are more wisdom-oriented; others are more passionate and emotional, as with Caitanya or the Âlvârs. In the following sections, we will review some basic themes related to the *bhakti* ideal, drawn predominantly from the Vaishnava traditions. In later chapters, we will touch upon *bhakti* as it appears within the contexts of Shaivism, Shaktism, and Sikhism.

Caitanya

Our approach to spirituality is very much determined by our psychological conditioning, which naturally also colors our sense of love or devotion for the Divine. *Gauna-bhakti,* or "secondary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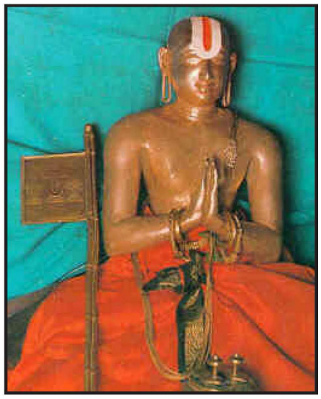
devotion," is the term given to devotion that is motivated by material ambition. This category includes *tâmasika* ("tamasic") and *râjasika* ("rajasic") forms of worship. Tamasic devotion is ill-motivated worship that seeks to invoke malignant forces or the destructive power of a deity in order to do harm. Rajasic devotion is supplication of the Divine for worldly ends, such as prosperity or fame. *Sâttvika* ("sattvic" or "pure") *bhakti,* again, aims at securing a place for ourselves in the heavenly realms. None of these forms of devotion can be said to truly represent the soteriological path of Bhakti-Yoga.

*Mûkhya-bhakti,* or "primary devotion," denotes worship devoid of ulterior motives; it is simple love of God. Usually this excludes even the desire for liberation. The sole motive of the *bhakta* is to please the Divine by engaging in selfless service. Some *bhakti* schools, however, are based on metaphysical systems that clearly aim at *moksha*, but even then it is liberation in the presence of the Divine.

## Bhakti as Emotion



Râmânuja

The deep emotionality in the Indian *bhakti* tradition is lucidly revealed in the ecstatic devotion of the South Indian Vaishnava saints, the Âlvârs. In their love poetry, one can see elements of deep longing, pangs of separation (*vigraha*) from their beloved Deity, as well as expressions of the supreme bliss of union. It is important to appreciate that all these emotions, or feelings, are regarded as being transcendental and are not to be confused with the everyday emotions of hankering for material things or mundane relationships. They are instead outpourings of hearts filled with devotion and freed from lust and selfish desire. The practice of devotion seeks to refine and cultivate the heart, so that the flow of love and awareness of God can become unobstructed.

Râmânuja, a medieval preceptor who carried on the mystical tradition of the Âlvârs, considered *bhakti* to be of the nature of knowledge of God as well as attachment to God. For Râmânuja, *bhakti* was not merely emotion but had within it an element of conscious understanding (*jnâna*) of the nature of the Divine. Others, like the followers of Caitanya, stressed the emotional quality of *bhakti* that eclipsed the knowledge of God, assuming their experience of the Divine to be more intimate. (See Bengali or Gaudîya Vaishnavism in YT, Chapter 12.)

## Bhakti as Surrender

The schools of *bhakti* typically avow a dualistic and theistic orientation, positing an eternal distinction between a plurality of individual selves (*jîva*) and God (*îshvara*, *bhagavat*). The diverse schools offer distinct interpretations of the relationship between individuals and the Divine, and not all of them posit a strict dualism.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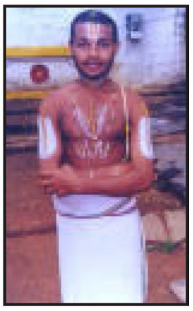

Vaishnava initiate

An important distinction is that between *bhakti* as a means (*sâdhana*) to perfection and *bhakti* as the goal (*sâdhya*) of all spiritual endeavor. In the *Yoga-Sûtra*, for instance, Patanjali discusses the practice of devotion to the Lord (*îshvara-pranidhâna*), which he states helps the *yogin* attain or perfect the ecstatic state. Shankara, too, views *bhakti* as a supportive element in the life of a practitioner. In the strict *bhakti* tradition, however, devotion is a spiritual ideal that has as its goal the cultivation of transcendental love (*preman*). The term *bhakti* (from the root *bhaj,* "to participate") conveys the notion of participation in the life of the Divine. This suggests an eternal connection between a plurality of souls (*jîva*) in immortal love with the Supreme Being (*purushottama, îshvara, bhagavat*).

Krishna and Râdhâ

At the heart of *bhakti* theology is the notion of surrender. We enter the life of Spirit when all egocentrism and self-based endeavor have subsided. In Bhakti-Yoga, all practices are meant initially to bring one to the threshold of true surrender in which we actualize our unity with the Divine. At that point, our seemingly independent will embraces the harmonizing love and grace of God. Thus, perfection in Bhakti-Yoga is achieved through self-transcending effort and grace.

Effort is summed up as the application of oneself to a body of practices or techniques, which in *bhakti-sâdhana* involve devotional contemplation, practical service, and ritual. Strong faith or love is the primary motivation in *bhakti,* and its expression is selfless service. All practices are performed in the mood of service—for the sake of generating pleasure in the Beloved. The *Nârada-Pâncarâtra* (quoted in the *Bhakti-Rasa-Amrita-Sindhu*) states that *bhakti* means utilizing the senses in the worship and service of the Lord of the senses, Hrishikesha.

Grace is the primary factor in the devotional life of a practitioner. Many devotional schools affirm that, in the final analysis, no amount of personal striving can help us generate *bhakti,* which is considered causeless—meaning, in this context, that there is no precondition to the attainment of love. Only the causeless grace of God can bestow perfection and liberation on the *bhakta,* or devotee.

Later *bhakti* schools, however, distinguish between a *sâdhana-siddha* (one who is perfected through practice) and a *kripâ-siddha* (one who spontaneously achieves perfection through grace). In practice, the devotee's surrender gradually fulfills itself through the graceful endowment with growing devotion. The notion of *abhyâsa,* or determined effort, is integral to Bhakti-Yoga. As we say in the West, "God helps those who help themselves."


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## Lord of the Heart

In Bhakti-Yoga, the object of devotion is always the divine Reality. Depending on whether we approach the Divine as a formless and nameless God or a personal deity, our love-devotion is either *nirguna-bhakti* ("unqualified love") or *saguna-bhakti* ("qualified love"). The latter is more common: The deep spiritual resources of the human heart are more readily awakened when we can enter a personal relationship with the ultimate Reality.

The term *ishta-devatâ,* which is widely used in the *bhakti* literature, can be roughly translated as "Lord of the Heart" and refers to the specific deity chosen as the object of devotion. Generally, the choice of deity is made by the *guru*, who recognizes the innate attraction a devotee has toward a specific manifestation of the Godhead. Here "Godhead" refers to the one supreme Person of whom all other manifestations are but pale reflections.

Krishna playing his magical flute, which fills human hearts with longing for the Divine

## Liberating Love

Pluralist schools, such as Nyâya, Vaisheshika, Sâmkhya, and Patanjali's Yoga, affirm that there are multiple Spirits (*purusha*), or Souls (*jîva*). The devotional schools, too, tend to subscribe to the existence of numerous, or even countless, individuated consciousnesses. Yet these are subsumed under the supreme Awareness of the transcendental Person, or Divine. They also make a definitive case for a differentiated destiny of the liberated being. Thus the various *bhakti* schools discuss five types of liberation: *sâyujya, sârûpya, sâlokya, sârshthi,* and *sâmîpya*. The first type refers to the loss of individuality upon realizing *Brahman,* the unmanifest and formless Ground of existence. The following four are the prerogative of devotees and represent progressive states of liberation in which individuality is retained: The liberated devotee receives a spiritual form, resides in the same dimension as the deity, attains God-like creativity, and, finally, attains close proximity and interaction with the Divine.

## Avatâra, Vyûha, and Other Divine Manifestations

The notion of the "divine descent" or "incarnation" (*avatâra*) is an important concept in the *bhakti* schools of Vaishnavism. Generally, ten major incarnations of Vishnu are accepted, including Râma and Krishna.

The teaching of the *vyûhas* (lit. "arrays") of Vishnu belongs to the doctrinal body of the early Pâncarâtra schools. A *vyûha* is a particularly glorious manifestation or aspect of the Divine, such as


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Nârâyana, Vasudeva, Shesha, Pradyumna, and so on. Various schools admitted two, three, four, or more such forms. Perhaps we can see in the idea of *vibhûti,* as first expressed in the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ,* an early version of this doctrine. In the *Gîtâ* (10.19ff), the God-man Krishna declares, for instance, that of all the *Vedas,* he is the *Sâma-Veda*; of all the deities, Indra; of all the sages, Bhrigu; of all the *mantras*, the sacred syllable *om;* of all the warriors, Prince Râma; and so forth.

Some Pâncarâtra scriptures, notably the *Ahirbudhnya-Samhitâ,* know of 39 manifestations (*vibhava*), including Kapila, Dharma, Nara, and so on. A related concept is that of the divine image (*mûrti*), which is understood as a manifestation of the Divine. Images are ritually worshiped in temples and the homes of devout *bhaktas*. All these notions are meant to convey that the Divine, though singular, is present in and as many forms.

## Lîlâ: Divine Play

The *rasa-lîlâ*

In strictly nondual traditions, *lîlâ* by definition means the unfolding of *brahman,* often in the sense of illusion. In the *bhakti* schools, however, *lîlâ* refers to the play of the Beloved. This love play may be enacted in a transcendental realm (*loka*) or in the phenomenal world by an *avatâra*. In terms of the former meaning, devotees and the divine Person exist in cocreative play outside the boundaries of time and illusion simply for unending reciprocal joy. Divine love flows in all directions, so that a devotee may even assume the "initiative" in his or her love relationship with the Divine. Ontologically, the supreme Person is always superior, but in *bhakti* mysticism the devotee may cross significant boundaries of formality. The intimacy he or she feels with the Divine, especially in the moment of ecstatic rapture, transcends even the very concept of divinity. In other words, in the reality of the supreme play (*lîlâ*), the conventional categories of the *bhakti* approach are lifted.


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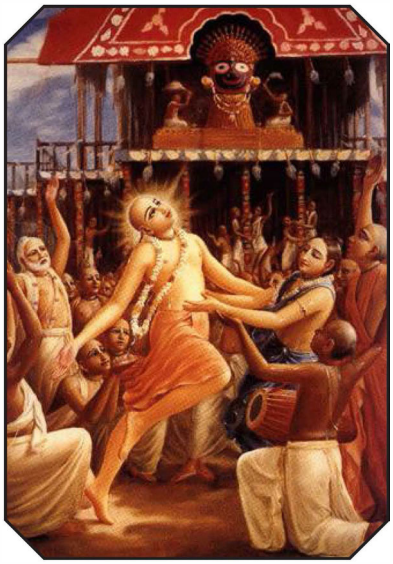
## Bhakti Rasa: Aesthetic Experience of the Divine

Krishna with his *gopîs*

Although poetry and song are perhaps the most natural and faithful modes for articulating the sentiments of mystical devotion, the philosophical language of aesthetics can also help us with better understanding spiritual feelings and experiences. *Rasa,* a term that finds its place in Indian aesthetic theory as well as Ayurveda, means "essence" or "taste," and in the context of theology (as in *bhakti-rasa*) denotes the mood or sentiment of loving exchange between soul and God. *Bhakti-rasa* is exhaustively treated from within the framework of Krishnaite theology in Rûpa Gosvâmin's *Bhakti-Rasa-Amrita-Sindhu*. This work employs the terminology of Indian secular aesthetics in discussing the experience of devotion. It mentions five primary and seven secondary moods of devotion called *rati*. The five primary moods are:

- *shânta* — peaceful neutrality
- *dâsya* — servility
- *sakhya* — friendly, filial bond
- *vâtsalya* — calf-like (i.e., trustingly dependent), parental affection
- *mâdhurya* — sweetness, the relation of a lover



Caitanya dancing in a state of ecstasy

These five categories of loving attachment are related to the penultimate stage of devotional attainment called *bhâva-bhakti*. When a devotional aspirant has become pure in heart through diligent practice and grace, he or she becomes established in a permanent and distinct love relationship with the Divine called *sthâyî-bhâva*. One thus serves the Godhead as master, friend, child, or lover. According to the *Bhakti-Rasa-Amrita-Sindhu,* one achieves a body of perfection (*siddha-deha*) at this stage, by which one can associate and reciprocate with the transcendent form of the Deity.

The elements and modes of ecstatic rapture that are involved in the experience of those who have achieved a fixed mood of devotion (*sthâyî-bhâva*) constitute what is called *bhakti-rasa*—the aesthetic experience of the divine. In other words, at this advanced stage of *bhâva-bhakti, bhaktas* undergo profound transformations and manifest ecstatic symptoms in their divine form. Their state of existence is deemed to be of a totally different order than that of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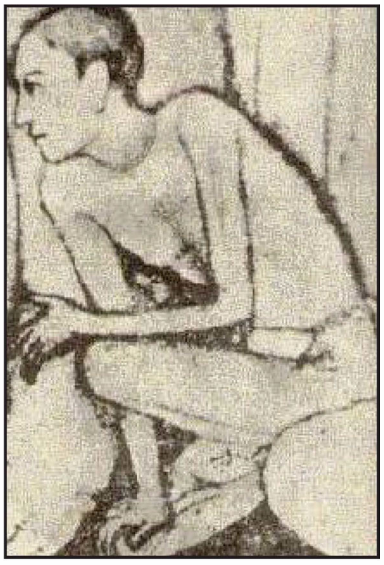
ordinary, conditioned beings. The nature of the blissful existence of a *bhâva-bhakta* is likened to one who has entered a great ocean of divine love. For them, every sound and perception act as a stimulus to heighten their participation in the love play of God and to augment their divine emotions. It is for this reason, the text is called "The Ocean of Immortal Love (*Bhakti-Rasa-Amrita-Sindhu*).



Rûpa Gosvâmin

This *bhâva-bhakti* is no longer devotion within the primary stages of cultivation (*sâdhana-bhakti*), but rather nearing ultimate perfection (*siddhatva*). If divine love (*prema*) is likened to the Sun fully reflected in the consciousness of the purified soul (*jîva*), then this *bhâva-bhakti* is compared to the dawning of the rays of the Sun on the surface of the heart.

From another perspective, Godhead is likened to the Sun, the guru to the cool waters below, and the disciple's heart to a blossoming lotus flower. If the flower of devotion is to mature into perfect love for the Divine, if it is to truly actualize its fullest innate potential, it must be grounded in the proper cultivation of virtues such as humility and surrender as well as directed by proper knowledge of the path and of devotional practices. Then, through proper cultivation, one can truly understand these mystical sentiments of devotion and not be inclined to sentimentality. *Bhakti* is wrongly attributed as a path for the emotional type. Most devotional traditions are based in Vedânta, but their Vedânta is "about love," and the utilization of the concepts and language of aesthetics is for discussing extremely subtle topics. Such topics are of a mystical rather than philosophical nature.

Mânikkavâcakar

The concept of archetypal forms of loving exchange with God, referred to above as *sthâyî-bhâvas,* has been accepted by devotional traditions outside the fold of Vaishnavism. One may thus worship the Goddess as mother or lover, and Shiva as master or even lover, as we see in the hymns of Tiruvâcakar or Mânikkavâcakar. Essentially it implies that upon the transcendence of the ordinary, limited ego, our sense of identity shifts to a more permanent Self or nature that continues on in a higher role with the Divine in whatever form is inherently appealing to us.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## Two Stages of Bhakti

According to the *Bhakti-Rasa-Amrita-Sindhu* (266-271) of Rûpa Go-svâmin, devotional practice has two principal stages: *vaidhî-bhakti* and *râga-anugâ-bhakti*. The former is devotion that is to be practiced following scriptural injunctions. The latter is devotion arising spontaneously in a heart that yearns for God. Perhaps we can characterize the former as "religious" and the latter as "spiritual" or "mystical." Few individuals experience the mystical stage of spontaneous self-surrender to the Divine without long practice first, following the prescribed routines.

## The Practice of Bhakti

The path of devotion entails various practices, and a well-known model is that of the nine types of devotional activity (*nava-vidha-bhakti*) first enunciated in the *Bhâgavata-Purâna* (see YT, p. 37):

Nara-Simha Avatâra

- *shravana* ("listening") — King Parikshit was a worthy heir to the throne, succeeding Yudhishthira, one of the five Pândavas mentioned in the great Indian epic *Mahâbhârata*. The *Bhâgavata-Purâna* notes how Parikshit was cursed by Shringi, the son of a rishi named Shamika, to end his life early. King Parikshit was given seven days to live and he chose to spend those last days at the feet of Shuka, the great *Bhâgavata* reciter. His famous question, "What is the duty of a man who is about to die?" called for the recitation of the *Bhâgavata-Purâna*. Thus, Parikshit spent his last days on the banks of the Ganges, accompanied by great sages and listening intently to their teachings and wise counsel.
- *kîrtana* ("praising") — Shuka was the son of Vyâsa, the semi-mythical personage to whom much of the *shruti* and *smriti* revelation is attributed by Hindu tradition. Nârada, the great preceptor of *bhakti*, had transmitted this *Bhâgavata-Purâna* to Vyâsa who at the appropriate time imparted these teachings to Shuka, famous for his recital to King Parikshit. Recitation of the hymns in sacred texts also falls under the category of *kîrtana*, or words and song in praise of the Divine.
- *smarana* ("remembering") — In the seventh canto of the *Bhâgavata-Purâna*, the story of Prahlâda and the Narasimha (man-lion) *avatâra* of Vishnu is narrated. Prahlâda was the son of Hiranyakashipu, a great demon who attained near invincibility through his *tapas,* or


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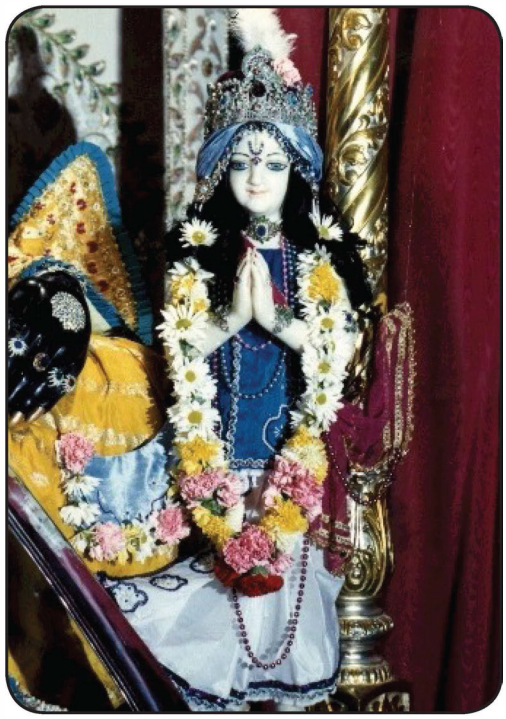
penance. Vishnu descended in order to secure the moral and cosmic order, which Hiranyakashipu was threatening, as well as to give solace to his beloved devotee, Prahlâda. Prince Prahlâda is widely honored as an ideal practitioner of *smarana*. Several times his life was threatened by Hiranyakashipu, and each time Prahlâda demonstrated complete faith in the protection of God, whom he saw as residing in every aspect of existence, not least his own heart.



Prahlâda, who has been elevated in parts of India to the status of a deity

- *pâda-sevana* ("serving at the feet") — Practically, *pâda-sevana* refers to rendering service to God in all circumstances. Mythologically and theologically, it is only the consort or intimate *bhakta* who can perform such service, as Lakshmî does to Nârâyana.

- *arcanâ* ("worshiping") — King Prithu is described as a partial manifestation of Vishnu's power in the *Bhâgavata-Purâna*. Thus Prithu is portrayed as a sacred king entrusted with establishing social and political harmony on the earth. He is known for his engagement in ritual sacrifice by which the natural and religious order was maintained as well as his connection with ritual worship (*arcanâ*). Ritual worship is a major limb of devotional practice and is related to temples and pilgrimage. The *Âgamas* were introduced by the different Hindu theistic traditions to promote ritual worship, temple construction, and codes of socioreligious conduct.

- *vandana* ("prostrating") — Akrura was a delegate sent by Kamsa, the king of Mathura during the time of Krishna. Kamsa was the main adversary of Krishna, and, according to the *Bhâgavata-Purâna,* one of the primary reasons for Krishna's descent was to defeat the evil ruler. Akrura was in fact a great devotee of Krishna and when he was sent to retrieve Krishna, Krishna revealed to him his divine nature. At this point, Akrura took absolute shelter in Krishna, prostrated before him, and recited verses in glorification. Because of this, Akrura is regarded as a classic example of this limb of devotion. *Vandana* is an essential part of ritual worship as well.

Hanumân

- *dâsya* ("slavish devotion") — Hanumân is one of the heroes of the *Râmâyana*. He represents the ideal servant of God, as recorded in his endeavor to save Sîtâ, wife of Râma, in this well-known Indian/South Asian epic. The mood of servant (*sevaka-abhimâna*) is prevalent in all modes of worship, for the Divine as God or Goddess is always philosophically regarded as the master.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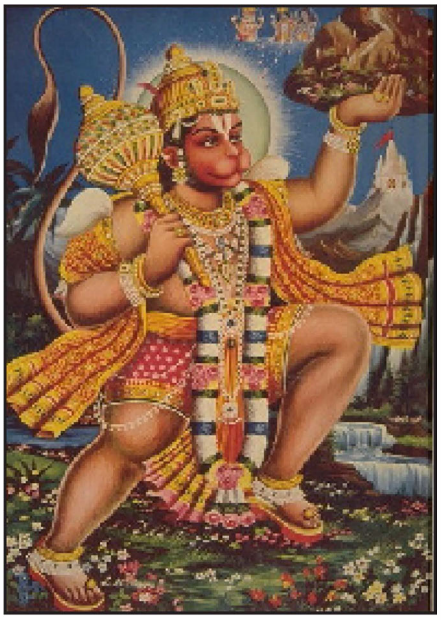
- *sâkhya* (“feeling of friendship”) — *Sâkhya* can mean having an amicable or favorable mood toward the Divine. More specifically it relates to a distinct mode of worship and intimacy offered to exalted servitors of the Godhead. Arjuna is a prime example of *sâkhya,* and narratives in the *Mahâbhârata* (including the *Gîtâ*), as well as the *Bhâgavata-Purâna,* reveal his close connection with Krishna.

- *âtma-nivedana* (“self-offering”) — The story of Bali is recorded in Canto 8 of the *Bhâgavata-Purâna*. By following the orders of his *guru*, Shukrâcârya, he was able to overcome Indra and his celestial kingdom. To restore order in the cosmos, Vishnu descended as a dwarf by the name of Vâmana through the womb of Aditi. When Bali offered the dwarf a boon, Vâmana (Vishnu) expressed that he was content and only wished to procure land to the extent of three of his strides. Bali agreed, disregarding the advice of his *guru*. Vâmana amazed all by covering the entire cosmos in three steps. Because Bali offered all his possessions and his heart and mind to the Lord, he is taken as an example of *âtma-nivedana*. The high-level practice of selfless surrender also is known as *sharana-gati* (“taking refuge”) and *prapatti*. Sometimes traditions even speak of a *prapatti-yoga* as a distinct approach to Bhakti-Yoga, and is deemed a difficult process. Surrender, however, characterizes all devotional practices.



Hanumat (Hanumân), faithful devotee of the God-man Râma

Ramakrishna in ecstasy

## The Body of Perfection

The body of the practitioner (*sâdhaka-deha*) is unable to contain the intense, rapturous energy of divine love (*preman*), and so the devotee is graced with a perfected body (*siddha-deha*), a spiritual form enabling him or her to cultivate the higher octaves of devotional love. Some practitioners go so far as to dress up and behave like a servant or a bride of the Supreme Person. This practice is frowned upon by more orthodox authorities, but was, for instance, engaged in by such a renowned adept as Ramakrishna, the *guru* of Swami Vivekananda. Overwhelmed with love for the Mother (the Divine in its feminine aspect), and to the consternation of many villagers, he dressed for a period of time in women’s clothes and even wore ornaments and makeup. This kind of devotional behavior blurs the distinction between *sâdhaka-deha* and *siddha-deha*.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## Ancillary Practices to Bhakti

**"Only by devotion can I be known."**

***—Bhagavad-Gîtâ*** (11.53-54)

Self-transcending action (*karman*) and self-knowledge (*jnâna*) are widely considered supportive of *bhakti* in its formative stages. At the transcendental level, the soul is free from any worldly or other-worldly impulses. The desire to delight the supreme Person is independently cultivated as *bhakti*. Thus all actions are imbued with remembrance of the Lord and are guided by discrimination; the devotee understands that he or she is not the actual performer of actions, but that everything is accomplished by the power of Nature (a lower manifestation of the Divine) and the will of God.

On the path of devotion, actions are to be performed entirely as an offering to one's chosen deity. The purpose of such self-transcending action dedicated to God is to release us from the sense of doership, which only entangles us further in the karmic nexus of Nature. Recommended activities include temple services and construction, ritual activity, and so on. Self-transcending action is the key to regulating the material level, so that ever-deeper self-knowledge can be attained. Yet, action and knowledge are often seen as complementary, as Bhakti-Yoga focuses on the virtue of serving God, which is done through self-transcending work.

Nârâyana, the supreme Godhead depicted in human form that makes devotional self-surrender easier

## Bhakti, Yoga, and Meditation

> The foundation (*pradhâna*) [i.e., Nature] is perishable. Hara [i.e., Shiva] is immortal and imperishable. This one God rules over the perishable [i.e., Nature] and souls (*âtman*). By contemplating and joining with Him and by becoming Reality (*tattva*), the magic (*mâyâ*) of the world ceases.
>
> ***—Shvetâshvatara-Upanishad*** (1.10). Transl. by Georg Feuerstein

According to some Shrî Vaishnava sources (see YT, Chapter 12), Bhakti-Yoga is based on the eight-limbed (*ashtânga*) path outlined in the *Yoga-Sûtra* (2.28ff). The goal, however, is different from that proposed by Patanjali. He envisions a state of perfect isolation (*kaivalya*), whereas the Vaishnava adepts aspire to unceasing contemplation of the Divine. The sublime vision of God, as


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Madhva puts it, is revealed to the devotee; it is a great gift, not a mechanical experience induced by techniques. Râmânuja has called this revelation *para-jnâna*.

The God-man Krishna with his bull Nandin

This Bhakti-Yoga is a contemplative path based upon Upanishadic precedents. Râmânuja equates the Upanishadic term *upâsana* with *bhakti* and proceeds to draw from the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* to more clearly establish the parameters of this path of liberation (*moksha-upâya*). Ultimately, the way of *bhakti* is to be aided by the ancillary limbs of *jnâna-* and *karma-yoga*. *Bhakti* in this sense is often characterized as constant meditation on the Divine imbued with intense love.

From another traditional perspective, devotional meditation entails a progressive internalization of the Divine's form in the mind's eye without the implementation of techniques such as *âsana*, *prânâyâma,* and the like. Through successive stages this internalization process is fostered by the cultivation of the nine forms of devotion mentioned above, especially the practices of chanting (*kîrtana*) and listening (*shravana*). The stages are: remembrance (*smarana*), concentration (*dhâranâ*), meditation (*dhyâna*), stable recollection (*dhruva-anusmriti*), and ecstasy (*samâdhi*).

All devotional practices are geared to direct the mind and heart to the personal deity until unaided, spontaneous attachment to God manifests. As Krishna assures Arjuna in the *Gîtâ* (11.54), "I can be known, seen, and entered only by exclusive (*ananya*) devotion." This is the primary contention of most *bhaktas*. God is not regarded as an object that can be attained, but an Ultimate Reality who can reveal himself/herself.

There are many forms of meditation leading to God-realization. Some must be practiced in private, while others should be performed throughout the day. Among these are:

- to see God as the creative source of Sun, water, trees, etc.
- to meditate upon God as one's inner Self, the seat of the Self in the cave of the heart
- to meditate on the form of God in the temple
- to meditate on God in the form of a *mantra*
- to meditate on the image of God in one's mind's eye
- to recollect not only the image of God, but also his or her names, qualities, forms, and pastimes


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## Practice as Communal Experience

*Bhakti* certainly has had a strong appeal for the masses, especially because for long periods they were excluded from the sacred knowledge, which was jealously guarded by brahmins. The *bhakti* movement swept aside caste and other distinctions and opened even advanced spiritual practice to anyone who cared to commit to the devotional path.

Although devotion by nature is a highly individualistic and subjective experience, it has manifested in India as a communal experience structured around temple worship, training in religious centers, large religious festivals, and the presence of saints who live in the holy places (*dhâman, tîrtha*). Holy places themselves hold great importance in a *bhakta's* life. Just as the scriptures suggest that we should seek out the company of other *bhaktas,* the atmosphere of holy places is said to awaken or promote devotion. Whenever *bhaktas* congregate, they strengthen the love for the same ultimate Person in each other. Love leaps from heart to heart and thereby makes the divine presence tangible.

According to the *Bhâgavata-Purâna*, Sage Nârada's devotion was kindled by spending time in the company of sages. During the months of the rainy season, his mother housed and fed a group of ascetics, and Nârada helped her and so was fortunate enough to hear their spiritual discourses. He became one of the principal preceptors of Bhakti-Yoga.

## Pilgrimage Centers

A holy place is considered a blessed "circle" (*mandala*) in which the transcendental dimension intersects with the phenomenal reality. A holy place is a location that has become transformed into a numinous, purifying, and transformative space. This is one reason for the traditional emphasis on pilgrimage (*tîrtha-yâtrâ*). The other is that such places allow the ordinary devotee to come into contact with true saints, whose presence and blessing make the mystery of devotion come alive. Devotees are likened to honeybees, who travel around and gather the essence of *bhakti* not only from saints, but also from scriptures, temples, and in fact every life circumstance.

Krishna temple in Patan, Nepal


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## Comments on Source Reading 4

# *Bhakti-Sûtra* of Nârada

**(YT, pp. 42-47)**

## Main Points

**1.** Sage Nârada lists a number of authoritative definitions of *bhakti*, including his own, in his *Bhakti-Sûtra*. Examining them, we can recognize some fundamental philosophical points common to most devotional schools.

> "*Bhakti* is fond attachment for worshiping the Lord in various ways."
> ***—Vyâsadeva***
>
> "*Bhakti* is fondness for narrations about the Lord, by the Lord, and so on."
> ***—Gârga Muni***
>
> "*Bhakti* results from one's removing all obstructions to taking pleasure in the Supreme Self."
> ***—Shândilya***
>
> "*Bhakti* consists of offering one's every act to the Supreme Lord and feeling extreme distress in forgetting Him.
> ***—Nârada***

**2.** Book I of Nârada's *Bhakti-Sûtra* begins by discussing the nature of *bhakti* and making it clear that devotion, the highest manifestation of love (2), is beyond conventional desire (5, 7). Book IV continues the thread of this discussion by qualifying conventional or secular love (*gaunî*) as being constituted of mundane qualities, namely the threefold modalities (*tri-guna*) of Nature (56).

*Bhakti* proper is positively described as an ecstatic state (68), a perfection by which one becomes deathless or immortal (3, 4), and as peace (*shânti*) and supreme bliss (*parama-ânanda,* 60). The word *prema* is indicative of the perfected state of *bhakti*, the state of divine love that is also inexpressible (*anirvacanîya,* 51). This *bhakti* or *preman* is self-evident to the experiencer (*svayam pramânatva,* 59). Most people will not understand this glorified state, for it is extremely subtle (*sûkshma,* 54).

**3.** The exemplar of the *bhakti* ideal is the *ekântin* (67), or radical and exclusive devotee. Such a one is beyond material designation (72) and is to be regarded as being of "Him" (*tadîya*). that is, God (73).


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Krishna with *gopîs*

**4.** The *gopîs* of Vraja (Vrindavâna), who are the intimate devotees of Krishna, are briefly mentioned (23) to make the point that our conventional standards of morality cannot be used in understanding the ethic of extreme self-sacrifice to God as revealed in their life examples. Nârada's definition of *bhakti* involves the dynamic of extreme agitation at forgetting God (19), a quality of the *gopîs*' devotion to Krishna. Without first understanding the glory of the Divine, however, one's so-called devotion is without credibility (23-24). Verse 82 provides an early, but rather unsystematic, listing of different forms of loving attachment to God. Extreme attachment to the object of worship is considered a primary measure of devotion. This naturally entails performing acts that are favorable to one's devotional disposition and rejecting those practices or forms of conduct that take away from one's cultivation of devotion (8-9).

**5.** Examining the prescriptions in Nârada's *Bhakti-Sûtra,* we learn how devotion can be achieved:

- renunciation of objects and clinging (35)
- hearing and reciting glorifications of the Lord (*shravana* and *kîrtana,* 37)
- avoidance of bad company (43)
- detached performance of duties, even in the perfected stage (62)
- consecration or resignation of one's whole being unto God, including desires and afflictive emotions (65)
- reflection on the scriptures to ascertain the proper course of engagement (76)
- skillful use of time (77)
- practice of virtues (78)
- constant worship of the Lord with one's whole being (79)

Overall, Nârada regards *bhakti* as being above the paths of *jnâna*, *karma,* and *yoga* (25). Verses 45-50 show an attitude of otherworldliness in line with the superlative nature of *bhakti*. Verse 49 states that one who renounces even the *Vedas*, meaning prescribed ritual activity, crosses over the triple world. Referring back to verses 8-12, we see the importance of overcoming worldliness while engaging in the devotional path. This path is one of restraint


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(14) in the context of resigning one's activities to the Divine (8). To one who consecrates his or her whole being to God, the Divine reveals itself (79-80).

## ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #17

# Bhakti-Yoga

by Georg Feuerstein

Gopîs

When we relax our habitual image of ourselves as egos wrapped in flesh, when we cut through our primal fear *(bhaya),* we get in touch with the power of love. Vedânta tells us that our essential nature is bliss *(ânanda)* or happiness, which is another word for love. But love suggests a more active involvement than does bliss or happiness. Perhaps it would not be wrong to say that love is the *practice* of happiness.

In the Hindu tradition of Bhakti-Yoga, such love is variously called *bhakti* or *preman*. This love comes not from the mouth or the head. It is a matter of the heart, which epitomizes the entire bodily being. Love wells up from the *anâhata-cakra,* the heart center, where the *yogin* perceives the "unstruck" (*anâhata*) sound[1], the boom of eternity, the immortal resonance *om*.

Love, or bliss, is a radiant force that bubbles up in us and, in its characteristic superabundance, flows out from us. When we are in love with a person, our love spills over to everybody and everything; it is not confined to our beloved. We embrace all, and our loving embrace is infectious. Love is ecstatic, and it engenders love. There is a great lesson in this, but a lesson that we seldom really learn, because as soon as we fall out of love with our beloved, we fall out of love with everyone and everything, including ourselves. Life looks drab again, or at least no longer quite as extraordinary, whereas our love or abundant happiness infused it with a vibrant vitality that made it enormously attractive.

Few people in our society know such love. It requires a great depth of feeling, and feeling is largely outlawed in our heady, patriarchal world. Feeling is different from emotionality. It is almost an extended form of the sense of touch. By comparison, emotions are mere local disturbances of the bodily field—anger, sorrow, fear, grief, excitement, envy, jealousy, and lust, and even such apparently positive emotions as pleasure, self-satisfaction, or warm regard. Feeling transcends them all, just


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as it transcends our self-sense and our bodily image. In feeling, we reach out beyond the apparent walls of our body-mind.

Krishna and Râdhâ

Feeling—free from emotional obscurations—is the carrier for the power of love. Bhakti-Yoga is thus the discipline of self-transcending feeling-participation in the world at large. Significantly, the Sanskrit word *bhakti* comes from the verbal root *bhaj,* meaning "to participate in." Through and in love, we participate in the larger Life, in what the teachers of Bhakti-Yoga call the Divine Person. That transcendental Person, or *purusha-uttama,* is the universal soil from which springs all life.

There can be no Yoga, no spiritual life, without self-understanding, disciplined self-application, and renunciation. Bhakti-Yoga thus contains elements of Jnâna-Yoga (the path of discriminative wisdom), Karma-Yoga (the path of self-transcending action), and Samnyâsa-Yoga (the path of renunciation).

At the beginning of his *Bhakti-Sûtra* ("Aphorisms on Love"), the legendary Sage Nârada notes that *bhakti* is not a form of lust because it entails the spirit of renunciation *(nirodha).* He explained renunciation as the consecration of all one's activities, whether religious or secular, to the Divine Person. Through this act of offering up one's works, a state of unification with the Divine is achieved.

This single-minded self-dedication is best epitomized in the spiritual passion of the cowherd girls for the God-man Krishna. According to legend, the *gopîs*, some of whom were married, were filled with a great longing whenever Krishna would play his flute.[2] Like the Pied Piper he beguiled and distracted them from their daily chores, irresistibly drawing them to him. When they had completely fallen in love with him, their hearts would be with the God-man even in his absence. The story of Râdhâ, Krishna's favorite shepherdess, relates how she pined for him like a love-sick girl. He would fuel her passion by prolonged periods of absence.

The story is a wonderful allegory of the play between the psyche and the higher Reality, which reveals itself in all its glory now and again, leaving us with a growing desire for divine union. The love mystics of medieval Christendom, notably Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Saint Theresa of Avila, and Saint John of the Cross, have bequeathed to us dramatic accounts of that miraculous work in the depth of the human psyche.[3]

Love, then, is not merely a temporary high, a feeling of elation. It must be cultivated as a continuous spiritual disposition. We must love even when we feel slighted, hurt, angered, bored, or depressed—especially in those moments. Bhakti-Yoga is the steady application of our feeling capacity in all life situations. Even in our worst moments, we must extend our love, or fundamental respect, to all others. Even though life consists of peaks and valleys, our overall commitment must be to what is revealed in our brief spells on the peaks.


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### Notes

1. The *anâhata-cakra,* which is also known as the *hrit-padma* ("heart lotus"), is one of seven principal psychoenergetic centers of the body.

2. For the playful relationship between Krishna and the cowherd girls, see D. R. Kinsley, *The Divine Player: A Study of Krsna Līlā* (Delhi: Banarsidass, 1979).

3. J. Welwood, *Journey of the Heart: Intimate Relationship and the Path of Love* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), p. 39.

**ADDITIONAL SOURCE READING**

# Worship Govinda (*Bhaja-Govinda*)

## Ascribed to Shankara

Translated by Georg Feuerstein

Worship Govinda! Worship Govinda! Worship Govinda! O foolish one! When the time [for dying] comes, grammatical rules will surely not protect you. (1)

O foolish one, abandon the thirst for amassing wealth! Create in your mind good, desireless thoughts. Whatever wealth your innate *karma* may bring, let your mind be satisfied with that. (2)

When you see beguiling female breasts do not become enthralled out of delusion. Again and again consider that it is only a modification of flesh and fat. (3)

The water on a lotus leaf is very unsteady. Similarly, life is extremely unstable. Know that the whole world is stricken with grief and conceit and consumed by illness. (4)

So long as you are able to generate wealth, your relatives will be attached to you. But later, when you inhabit an aged body, no one will ask you how you are faring. (5)

So long as the breath dwells in your body, one will inquire about your well-being. When the breath leaves, upon the body's demise, your wife [or husband] fears that same body. (6)

As a child, one is attached to play; as a youth, one is attached to girls. As an adult, one is attached to [all kinds of] concerns. But no one is attached to the supreme Absolute (*para-brahman*). (7)


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Who is your wife? Who is your son? This world of change is very strange! Whose are you? Who are you? From where have you come? O brother, consider this truth here! (8)

Hanumat (Hanumân)

From association with the virtuous [comes] nonattachment. From nonattachment [comes] freedom from delusion. Freedom from delusion [leads to] steadfastness. From steadfastness [results] living liberation (*jîvan-mukti*). (9)

When one's youth is gone, what lustful diversions are left? When water has dried up, what lake is left? When one's wealth is gone, what relatives remain behind? When Truth is known, what world (*samsâra*) is there? (10)

Do not be proud of wealthy kinfolk or your youth. Time robs you of all these in an instant. Letting go of this illusory world, come to know the state of *brahman* and enter into it. (11)

Day and night, dusk and dawn, winter and spring come over and over again. Time is playful, and life is fleeting. Still one does not abandon the winds of hope. (12)

What of your concerns for wife and wealth? O crazy one, is there no [divine] Ruler for you? In the three worlds, only the association with virtuous people can serve as a boat for crossing the ocean of existence. (13)

The ascetic with matted locks, the one with shaven head, the one with plucked out hair, the one wrapped in various robes—such a one is a fool who, though seeing, does not see. Indeed, the many donned vestments serve his belly only. (14)

With his body decrepit, his head turned gray, his mouth toothless, having a paunch, the old man moves about holding onto a staff. Even then he fails to shed the stack of hopes. (15)

Fire in front, the Sun at his back, at night his knees drawn up to his chin, with alms in the palm of his hand—thus he lives under a tree, and still he fails to shed the noose of hopes. (16)

He goes to where the Ganges meets the ocean and observes vows or generosity. Yet, according to all schools, bereft of wisdom, he cannot enjoy liberation even in a hundred lifetimes. (17)

Whether dwelling in the temples of deities or at the foot of trees, sleeping on the ground, wearing a hide, or renouncing all possessions and their enjoyment—for whom does dispassion not bring happiness? (18)


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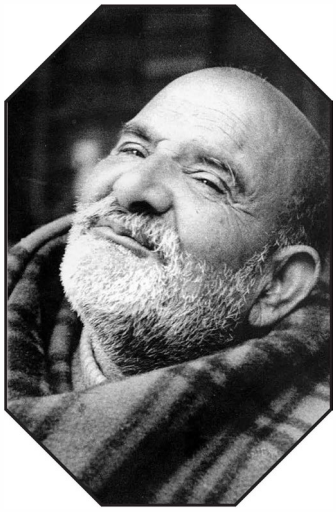
Fond of Yoga or fond of pleasure, fond of company or without company—he whose mind delights in *brahman*, he alone is happy, happy, happy. (19)

He who has studied the Lord's Song even a little, who has imbibed a drop of Ganges water, and at least once has worshiped the Foe of Ari [i.e., Krishna]—for him there is no confrontation with death. (20)

Repeated birth, repeated death, repeated residing in the maternal belly. By your grace, O Murâri [i.e., Krishna], save me from this world, which is exceedingly difficult to transcend! (21)

The *yogin* who wears a dress from rags found in the streets and is on the path beyond merit and demerit, with his mind immersed in Yoga, he is [always] delighted just like a child or madcap. (22)



Neem Karoli Baba, a great worshipper of Rama and the *guru* of Ram Dass (Richard Alpert)

Who are you? Who am I? Whence have I come? Who is my mother? Who is my father? Inquire thus, while letting go of the entire world, which is inessential and comparable to a dream. (23)

In you, in me, and in everything else there is only Vishnu. You become impatient and angry with me for nothing. See the Self in everything, and everywhere cast off divisive knowledge. (24)

Make no effort to associate or dissociate from enemy, friend, offspring, or relatives. If you wish to attain Vishnuhood quickly, then be even-minded toward everything. (25)

Letting go of desire, anger, greed, and delusion, contemplate "Who am I?" Those who lack self-knowledge are fools: They are captives frying in hell. (26)

The [*Bhagavad-*]*Gîtâ* and the *Sahasra*[*-Nâma*] should be chanted. The beauty of the Lord of Shrî should always be contemplated. The mind should be guided to the company of virtuous people. And wealth should be distributed among the poor. (27)

One easily comes by sensual enjoyment; afterward disease afflicts the body. Even though death is the [only] "refuge" in the world, one still does not abstain from evil conduct. (28)

Always be aware that wealth is useless. There truly is not the least happiness from it.

Kanya Kumari Temple, South India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Those who worship wealth even fear their sons. Everywhere this is the custom. (29)

Breath control, sense-withdrawal, discerning inquiry into what is eternal and what is finite, and the method of ecstasy through recitation [of *mantras*]—do these attentively, with great attention. (30)

Devoting yourself deeply to the *guru's* lotus feet, become quickly released from the world! Thus by restraining the mind along with the senses, you will come to see the God (*deva*) stationed within your own heart. (31)

**Hare Krishna Hare**
**Krishna Krishna Krishna**
**Hare Hare**
**Hare Rama**
**Hare Rama Rama Rama**
**Hare Hare**


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## Unshakeable Faith

Once upon a time, the great sage Nârada was visiting the Earth and came upon a brahmin. Seeing Nârada, the brahmin rose and welcomed the sage. After the customary formalities, he inquired of the sage where he was headed, and Nârada replied that he was on his way to see Nârâyana (God) soon. The brahmin requested that he question the Lord as to when he, the brahmin, would attain him. Nârada agreed and left.

Then the sage came upon a cobbler sitting beneath a banyan tree mending shoes. Upon seeing Nârada, the cobbler rose and greeted Nârada enthusiastically. He too asked the sage to inquire about his prospects of uniting with Nârâyana.

In due course, Nârada traveled beyond the cosmos and reached the realm of Nârâyana.

He met with the Lord, and when the opportunity arose, he communicated the queries of the brahmin and the cobbler. Nârâyana's response was, "I will grace the brahmin after many births. As for the cobbler, he will soon be in my company. When they ask after me, tell them that I am threading elephants through the eye of a needle." Puzzled, Nârada agreed to relay the message.

On his return to the village where he had met these two devout bhaktas, Nârada approached the brahmin and told him what Nârâyana had said. The brahmin was pleased and broke into laughter when he heard the part about the elephants.

Next Nârada visited the cobbler, who was joyous to hear of his good fortune, but when Nârada mentioned to him Nârâyana's strange comment, he expressed even more happiness.

The great sage asked him, "Do you really believe that Nârâyana could be passing elephants through the eye of a needle?" In response, the cobbler picked up the seed of a banyan tree and remarked, "When I see the miracle of this small seed, out of which grows an enormous tree, I realize that anything is possible for our Lord. Nothing is impossible for him." Now Nârada understood why the cobbler would enter the divine realm and be in Nârâyana's company at the end of the present lifetime. The man's faith was pure and simple. How pure and simple is yours?


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## FOR REFLECTION

**1.** Do you consider yourself an emotional person or would you describe yourself as predominantly intellectual? What is your preeminent negative emotion—anger, fear, envy/jealousy, lust, pride, greed, guilt, shame, sorrow, or a feeling of inadequacy? Do your emotions sometimes (or frequently) disturb your peace of mind? How do you deal with your negative emotions? Do you actively cultivate positive emotions, such as love, forgiveness, kindness, tolerance? Are emotions relevant to spiritual life?

**2.** Reading about, or meditating on the image of, a deity or master is traditionally said to bring inner peace. Do you avail yourself of this practice? Which great adept or "role model" are you particularly attracted to? Use an external image or your inner (mental) image of your favorite adept/role model to open your heart and, for ten minutes, ponder the attractive qualities of this person and consider how you might cultivate the same qualities in your own life.

**3.** What are your thoughts about people who claim to love God or their *guru* and diligently practice all the prescribed teachings of their particular school but fail to practice love toward others? If a teacher or teaching demanded of you that you exclude a person or a group of people because they are "outsiders," would this be in the spirit of Yoga?

**4.** The conscious surrender of one's will to that of a supreme Deity is at the basis of *bhakti-yoga*. What reactions or feelings do you have about the concept of surrender? Do you feel it is a psychological need to find reassurance in something outside of one's self, or is it a legitimate spiritual process?

**5.** This notion of surrender also is connected with the notion of letting go of the seeking impulse. The spiritual process may just be a perpetuation of one's inherent nature for self-preservation as in the case of "spiritual materialism." We bring our ego and opinions into our spiritual endeavors. In this regard, is it healthy to have devotion to a *guru* or deity? Do we need to trust at some point a higher source of authority outside of ourself? What is your idea about the connection between the *guru*, the Divine, and the Self?

**6.** The term *bhakti* is often translated as "participation in the life of the Divine." The concept of absolute harmony thus means absolute resignation of the Self's desire to that


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For Reflection ctd.

of the greater whole, dictated by Godhead. Do you feel there is a conscious force directing the unfolding of Nature? Do you recognize the possibility of harmony within the sphere of human social relations and the greater web of life? How does self-preservation and self-interest take away from the good of the greater whole? What role could self-sacrificing action play in this condition we call life? Consider this before studying the next section on Karma-Yoga.

**7.** Consider what meanings the words "sacrifice" and "surrender" hold for you? Why do you feel about them the way you do?

**8.** Most *bhakti* teachers emphasize the cultivation of simplicity. This does not mean that one should not be intellectual, but rather that one should have clear trust in the Lord. One should also have a pure and uncomplicated heart, free from petty desires, as illustrated by the preceding popular narrative is particularly expressive of this theme. Would you consider yourself as a "simple" person? What do your family and friends think?

## FURTHER READING

Bhaktivedanta Swami. *The Nectar of Devotion*. New York: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1979.

Prem Prakash. *The Yoga of Spiritual Devotion: A Modern Translation of the Narada Bhakti Sutras*. Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 1998.

Jyotir Maya Nanda, Swami. *The Yoga of Divine Love: A Commentary on the Narada Bhakti Sutras*. Miami: Yoga Research Foundation, 1982.

Sivananda, Swami. *Essence of Bhakti Yoga*. Sivanandanagar, India: Sivananda Literature Research Institute, 1960.

Tyagisananda, Swami. *Narada Bhakti Sutras*. Mylapore, India: Ramakrishna Math, 5th ed., 1972.

Vivekananda, Swami. *Bhakti-Yoga*. Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1970.


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# QUESTIONNAIRE #5

Please SUBMIT this questionnaire to TYS: tyslearning@sasktel.net
Don't forget to include your full name, email address, date, and course title. Please refer to our instructions on p. 17.

**1. How would you explain the essential orientation of Bhakti-Yoga?** *(Check one)*

(a) to serve one's guru
(b) to love and serve God
(c) to discern between good and evil
(d) to practice selfless service to one's fellow humans

**2. Grammatically speaking, what does the Sanskrit word *bhakti* mean?** *(Check one)*

(a) worship
(b) devotion
(c) participation
(d) love
(e) self-surrender
(f) self-transcendence
(g) communion

**3. In Bhakti-Yoga, what is meant by "slavish devotion" (dâsya)?** *(Check one)*

(a) total dedication to the rituals
(b) complete faith in the principles of Bhakti-Yoga
(c) unconditional clinging to the Divine
(d) prostration before an image of God
(e) ecstatic experience of the Divine

**4. What kind of philosophical/metaphysical underpinning does Bhakti-Yoga favor?** *(Check one)*

(a) nondualistic
(b) polytheistic
(c) monotheistic
(d) dualistic


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**5. Which of the following did Râmânuja believe?** *(Check one)*

(a) that love is far superior to ritual
(b) that ritual worship is the best form of worship of God
(c) that love and knowledge are compatible
(d) that knowledge can never lead to love
(e) that ritual worship can complete knowledge

**6. In general, which of the following do the schools of Bhakti-Yoga consider true?** *(Check one)*

(a) grace and effort on the path are equally important
(b) self-effort is more important than grace
(c) grace is the most important aspect of the path to God

**7. How many types of liberation does Bhakti-Yoga recognize?** *(Check one)*

(a) one
(b) two
(c) three
(d) four
(e) five
(f) six

**8. How many aesthetic sentiments does Bhakti-Yoga recognize?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) one
(b) two
(c) three
(d) four
(e) five
(f) six
(g) seven
(h) eight
(i) nine


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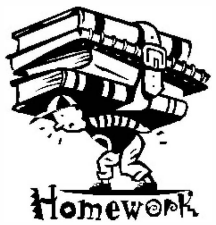
# LESSON 6

## I. Objectives

This lesson has the following two objectives:

- to help you understand the importance of right action
- to introduce you to Karma-Yoga, the path of self-transcendence in and through right action
- to consider the extreme case of war, which is the fulcrum of the teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*
- to introduce you to Green Yoga as a continuation of traditional Karma-Yoga

## II. Homework Assignments




- **Read** section VI of Chapter 2 in *The Yoga Tradition* book (pp. 47–51).
- **Read** all materials of Lesson 6 in this Study Guide, including Additional Study Materials #18–29.
- **Ponder** the questions under "For Reflection" and jot down your significant thoughts.
- **Answer Questionnaire #6 and submit.**
- **Practical Assignment:** Go out of your way to help a neighbor (gardening, shopping, etc.). Review your mental and emotional reactions before, during, and after your particular service. To what degree are you able to leave your ego behind?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## III. Introductory Remarks

All Yoga calls for one action or another. In Jnâna-Yoga, the mind is engaged to practice discernment (*viveka*) between the ultimate Reality and conventional realities, which, by comparison, are of the nature of illusions or delusions. Bhakti-Yoga involves a great deal of ritual worship, as does Tantra-Yoga. Hatha-Yoga emphasizes physical acts like proper posture and breathing, etc., while Râja-Yoga focuses on a particular kind of mental activity, which leads in due course to the various states or levels of ecstasy (*samâdhi*). Mantra-Yoga, again, involves the regular recitation of sacred sounds (*mantra*). Karma-Yoga, the focal point of the present lesson, addresses action in general and offers a traditional answer to the central existential question: What must I do?

This is the special subject matter of the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ,* which is often regarded as the single most important work on Hindu Yoga. Although the *Gîtâ,* as this text is widely referred to, is not counted among the revealed scriptures (*shruti*) of Hinduism, it is nevertheless treated with a similar respect by the millions of adherents of Vaishnavism and others.

The context—or pretext—of the teachings of the *Gîtâ* is a famous, or infamous, war--the so-called Bharata war in which the God-man Krishna participated as a wise and even wily charioteer and guru/advisor to Prince Arjuna. What better situation than a devastating war could there be to develop a philosophy of right action? From the vantage point of our present era, which has witnessed two world wars, we must of course wonder whether war is ever justified and whether we ought not preferrably understand the Bharata war as a metaphor or allegory, as some traditional interpreters have done.

Today, at a time of world-wide environmental crisis the teachings of the *Gîtâ* are especially pertinent, and this lesson will consequently elaborate on the relevance of Karma-Yoga as a proto-type of contemporary Green Yoga.

Ramana Maharshi—a prototypical *jnâna-yogin*—is reported as having said in response to a question posed by the well-known British scholar and translator of Tibetan texts W. Y. Evans-Wentz:

> E-W: Is work an obstruction to Self-realization?
>
> R.M: No, For a realized being the Self alone is the Reality, and actions are only phenomenal, not affecting the Self. even when he acts he has no sense of being an agent. His actions are involuntary and he remains a witness of them without any attachment.
>
> There is no aim for this action. Even one who is sitll practicing the Path of Wisdom (*jnana*) can practice while engaged in work. It may be difficult in the earlier stages for a beginner, but after some practice it will soon be effective and the work will not be


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found a hindrance to meditation.[1]

Long before Ramana Maharshi, the great advocate of Vedântic nondualism Shankara composed devotional hymns (*stotra*). This shows us that the Hindu tradition does not view Jnâna-Yoga in opposition to *bhakti*.

**Note**

1. *Talks with Ramana Maharshi: On Realizing Abiding Peace and Happiness*, (Carlsbad, Calif.: Inner Directions Publishing, rev. ed. 2000), p. 8.

**Catherine Ingram: Your Holiness, there are many people in the West who want to combine their spiritual practice with social and political responsibility. Do you feel that these two aspects are connected?**

**Dalai Lama: I feel that the essence of spiritual practice is your attitude toward others. When you have a pure, sincere motivation, then you have the right attitude toward others based on kindess, compassion, love, and respect. Practice brings the clear realization of the oneness of all human beings and the importance of others benefiting by your actions.**

Catherine Ingram, *In the Footsteps of Gandhi* (Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press, 1990), pp.11–12


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# VI. Karma-Yoga: Freedom in Action

## (YT, pp. 47-51)

"Yoga is skill in action."

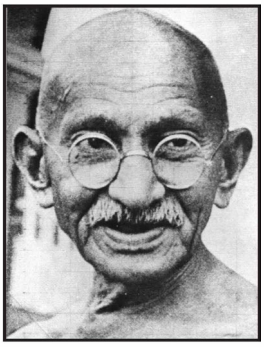
—***Bhagavad-Gîtâ*** (2.50)

"Verily it is impossible for an embodied being to renounce all action. But he who relinquishes the fruit of action is [truly] a relinquisher."

—***Bhagavad-Gîtâ*** (18.11)

"Death is unimportant to a yogi; he does not mind when he is going to die. What happens after death is immaterial to him. He is only concerned with life—with how he can use his life for the betterment of humanity."

**—B. K. S. Iyengar**
*The Tree of Yoga,* p. 35



Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was generally called "Mahatma"—a label he vigorously rejected but which nonetheless stuck. He was assassinated in 1948, one year after India's independence from the British empire.

## Overview

As embodied beings, we are constantly forced to act. Even when we sit completely still, our mind is likely to work overtime—or at the very least our heart is pumping and our lungs are busy sucking in and expelling air. Karma-Yoga is India's answer to this inbuilt disposition toward activity in humans.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## Main Points

**1.** The Sanskrit word *karman* (nominative and accusative: *karma*) has several meanings. In general, it simply means "action," "activity," or "work." In particular, it refers to the "fruit" (*phala*), or result, of action. This is the meaning that is uppermost in people's minds when they hear the word *karma*.

**2.** The concept of work (*karman*) as a means to spiritual fulfillment has its genesis in the Vedic notion of sacrifice (*yajna*). Karma-Yoga, or Karma-Mârga (path of action), brings fresh significance to many core ideas of the Vedic tradition but goes beyond ritualism. Specifically, Karma-Yoga can be said to tie together the main theme of Vedic Yoga and that of the Upanishadic teachings. On the one hand, it encourages participation in the world in such a way that all our actions contribute to and reflect the natural harmony of the cosmos. On the other hand, it has the ultimate purpose of realizing the transcendental Ground of creation—our true Self.

**3.** Morally sound action is integral to all Yoga, and therefore Karma-Yoga merely spells out in detail the attitude *yogins* must cultivate if they are involved with day-to-day activities. According to the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, the fruit of moral action, when performed skillfully, is liberating wisdom.

**4.** The most important Hindu Yoga text discussing Karma-Yoga is the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*. In the *Gîtâ*, Krishna understands Yoga as skillful action. This implies a thorough experiential knowledge of the workings of Nature, or the wheel of life and death. It also implies the key notion of inaction in action (*naishkarmya-karman*), which is to act out of inner freedom and not out of the karmic conditioning of the limited ego-personality.

**5.** In the *Gîtâ* (3.20), Karma-Yoga is linked with the concept of *loka-samgraha,* the welfare of society or the world at large. Altruistic activity begins when we see beyond the limited self and acknowledge Nature (*prakriti*) as the true agent of action, with the transcendental Self (*âtman*) being a mere witness.

***yogah karmasu kaushalyam***

**Yoga is skill in actions.**

***—Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (2.50)**


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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #18**

# Reflections on Karma-Yoga

by Georg Feuerstein

What ought I do? After the big existential question "Who am I?" this is surely the second-most important question that every sensitive, thinking individual should ask himself or herself. while "Who am I?" sets the stage as it were for thoughtful, truly philosophical living, "What ought I do?" provides us with direction.

Both questions, or rather our answers to them, are interdependent. We cannot meaningfully respond to one without taking the other into account. If we were to answer only the first question but ignore the second, we might as well say: So what? So what if I am more than I seem to be? So what if I am really infinite Being? How will such recognition serve me here and now? How will it make my finite life meaningful?

If, again, we were to come up with an answer to the second question but leave the first question unconsidered or unanswered, we are left with a great uncertainty: How do I know that the direction I am taking makes sense in terms of my answer to "Who am I?" If I don't know who I am, how can I possibly know where to go and what to do without running the risk of violating my nature or erring about my goal and purpose or the steps along the way?

From what we know about cultural history, people have always sought answers to these two fundamental questions, and we can look at traditional philosophies as providing answers. With the rise of scientific materialism, these questions receded into the background, and consequently our modern civilization has become rudderless. This unfortunate development has caused people in general to become confused and devitalized. This, in turn, has led to the kind of suicidal impulse that we can witness today in regard to the brutalization and neglect of the environment. As literally thousands of scientists and researchers are agreed, the environmental crisis is so severe that, in the absence of a concerted effort to salvage the environment, we must expect a complete biosphere collapse in the foreseeable future.

Brenda (my wife) and I have written about this at some length in our books *Green Yoga* and *Green Dharma*. I will not repeat myself here but simply point out that anyone seriously interested in spiritual life must sincerely strive to find deep answers to the two questions: "Who am I?" and "What


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ought I do?"

Since the world in which we live is in such turmoil and heading toward collapse, we clearly must do our best to ensure its survival, so that our species and all others may have a future. Thus, the world situation itself defines a large part of our moral imperative. Well over 2,000 years ago, Prince Arjuna found himself in a similar position. As a member of India's royalty and as a trained warrior, karmic forces had brought him to the brink of what would be the most devastating war Indian soil had ever witnessed. He was joined by Krishna, the king of the Yâdavas and a God-realized master. As an embodied being, he too was subject to the law of karma, though in his case there was no inner conflict.

However, Arjuna—a sensitive man—was hugely troubled by the imminent war. He did not really want to fight the enemy whose ranks included family members, friends, and respected teachers. Bound by diverse personal and tribal obligations, they all had dutifully showed up on the battle field of Kurukshetra to smite the enemy.

Similarly, we who are alive today have no choice but to live in a toxic environment, which, moreover, is in the process of total collapse. We could ignore this fact, but it would not lessen our ailing environment's impact upon our body and mind. All sorts of chronic diseases are on the rise, because our immune system is capitulating. The World Health Organization and other institutions have alerted governments to the fact that they must prepare for devastating pandemics, which are predicted to kill millions of people.

As global warming proceeds, it will also claim many victims as a result of flooding, drought, landslights, and other so-called natural disasters. We could indeed ignore all this, as most members of the human race are doing. But we would not escape Nature's "bloody tooth."

The context for Karma-Yoga in our present time has been set for us. It is what it is. Like Arjuna, there is no way out—none that would be deemed honorable and functional. As a pacifist, I don't look favorably upon any kind of war, and I do not even entirely accept that the Bharata war in which Arjuna and Krishna participated was a historical event, as described in the *Mahâbhârata* epic and the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* found in that epic. Be that as it may, the Bharata war is at least a good allegory for the struggle of life in general and the present global situation in particular.

We might not like the idea of living at a time of war, but sooner or later we all will have to admit that the environmental catastrophe is placing us in a situation similar to war where so much is at risk and where everyone experiences deprivations and great discomforts.

But even under "normal" circumstances, we are always facing priorities. Our child is sick. We are sick. We are late for work. The boss is cranky or unfair. Taxes are due. Our favorite food is giving us an upset stomach. An unfriendly neighbor is maligning us. A stray cat keeps spraying our porch. And so on.

Each situation is a bit like war in miniature. It requires our attention and energy.

This is where Karma-Yoga becomes relevant. What did Krishna recommend to Arjuna? First of all, he told him to not collapse emotionally under the sway of circumstances. Instead, he encouraged him


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to fight, that is, to bravely face the situation and do what is necessary. He also explained to Arjuna that he should not be concerned about eventual results. Of course, we want our child to feel well again. We want our sickness to go. We don't want our boss to yell at us or the stray dog to spray our porch. All this is understandable. But whenever we cling too strongly to our expectations, we set ourselves up for disappointment and frustration.

Thus, it is best to focus on right action, which is action that is self-evident when we look at a situation more closely and with a cool head, a calm disposition. When we are agitated or upset, we are bound to misinterpret the situation and then resort to wrong action, which is likely to make the situation worse. A tranquil mind is *sattvic* and gives us *sattvic* understanding. It also makes us predisposed toward *sattvic* action, which is right action. This is one of the most important lessons to learn in life. Admittedly, it is also a difficult lesson, because as human beings we tend to go with our habits, and often our habits are not so impressive and lead us toward suffering rather than happiness and freedom.

The environmental crisis is, as former U.S. Vice President Al Gore put it, a great inconvenience. It is an inconvenience for the ego, which always likes its comfort and status quo. The environmental crisis, however, is our present reality, whether or not we push it out of our consciousness. It is impacting our lives already, and it will impact our lives still more in the near future. So, we have no choice but to take it into account in how we live. Since the catastrophic state of the environment is of our own making, we don't even have the luxury of blaming someone else.

If we were to follow Krishna's Karma-Yoga, we would have to do something about it—as individuals and as a species. Exactly what we would have to do depends on our individual disposition, capacity, and personal circumstances. Krishna did not pick up arms during the Bharata war, but he acted as Arjuna's advisor and saved him from many errors and misfortunes. Ultimately, he led Arjuna to victory. Arjuna fought, maimed, and killed to restore order to his kingdom. Krishna remained in a more *sattvic* state.

Everybody must inquire into their own nature what sort of action would be appropriate for them. Everyone can do something. In fact, everyone is called to do something, whether it is small private acts of recycling and reusing or big public acts of vehement protest. The right action we choose to do must also be authentic of us. It would have been wrong and inauthentic for Krishna to fight directly. If we can believe the *Mahâbhârata*, it would have been equally wrong for Arjuna to sit back in his war chariot and refuse to take up arms.

Whatever action we decide on, we must engage it in the spirit of self-transcendence, which means without egoic clinging and with the firm intention of benefiting others. Without this vital element, action would not amount to Karma-Yoga but merely to karma in the sense of binding destiny. What we do not transcend, we must inevitably repeat.


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ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #19

# What Is Spiritual Activism?

by Georg Feuerstein

If by activism we mean the kind of action that is intended to bring about socio-cultural change, then *spiritual* activism is such action engaged from a perspective that takes spiritual values, principles, and goals into account. But what is meant by "spiritual"? Here the matter becomes somewhat more complicated. In part, one's answer will depend on one's religious or philosophical leanings. Thus, a practicing Christian is likely to respond differently from a practicing Buddhist. My own answer, as furnished in the following, gestures toward a more generic formulation, though I am mostly inspired by the sophisticated tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism.

Outside the Christian religious context in which it took shape, the term "spiritual" tends to be used rather indiscriminately and ambiguously. Linguistically and historically, it refers to "spirit," which stands for the "higher," "transcendental" aspect of the human being. This concept is problematic and has been rejected by many thinkers, including some Christian theologians. In light of this, I propose to use "spiritual" here in the sense of "self-transcending." This captures the kind of orientation and actual conduct that aims at going beyond egotism and, even more profoundly, beyond the very sense of ego. Instead, it favors a state of consciousness that experiences itself as deeply connected to the rest of the world.

Thus, using the term "spiritual" is a concession to popular parlance but without the hypostasis that is often associated with the cognate term "spirit." Spiritual activism, then, is activism in which theory and practice converge to fulfill our greater human potential, notably our capacity for self-transcendence, regardless of our specific religious or philosophical orientation.

For spiritual activism to be authentic, it must be grounded in mindfulness [see Lesson 4] and reverence for life [see the following essay] as vital voluntary disciplines. Without the proper cultivation of these two practices, spiritual activism is apt to become mere conventional activism, which is often driven by subconscious motives and undesirable emotions that have little to do with the proclaimed ideals and goals.


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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #20**

# Reverence for Life

by Georg Feuerstein

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I undertake to cultivate compassion
and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals.
I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing
in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.

**—Thich Nhat Hanh**

As self-aware beings whose actions impact on other beings, we must ask ourselves about the moral implications of our actions. Ethical inquiry is a cornerstone of responsible living. In *Apologema,* Plato quotes Socrates as saying that the unexamined life (*anaxétastos bíos)* is not worth living and that the greatest good (*agathón*) for a human being is to converse daily about virtue. He made this statement before the tribunal that condemned him to death for his supposedly heretical and seditious activity. He had been charged with undermining Athens's official religion and corrupting the youth.

As Socrates amply demonstrates in his dialogues, as recollected by Plato, the philosophical life revolves around the great values of goodness and beauty. Without conscious moral choices, and giving free rain to the uncontrolled mind, we are apt to indulge in all manner of actions that follow the dictates of the unconscious and thus are likely to be injurious rather than beneficial to others. For, to cultivate the good and beautiful (*kalós*) calls for philosophical self-inspection.

Already the Hindu *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, written in its extant form around the time of Socrates, admits that it is difficult to determine right action from wrong action and that even abstention from action (which in the final analysis is impossible) can have negative consequences for oneself and others. And yet, we must make every effort to attain clarity in ethical matters, as indeed did Prince Arjuna, the hero of the *Gîtâ,* who received instruction from Krishna, a king and enlightened spiritual adept.

Well over 2,000 years later—and without an illumined teacher to guide him—the German theologian-physician-organist Albert Schweitzer deeply pondered the moral foundations of human


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life. He relates in his autobiography *Out of My Life and Thought,* how, while making his way upstream on a meandering African river and amidst a group of hippopotamuses, he suddenly found the solution to the puzzle. It presented itself in the form of the notion of "reverence for life."

This discovery was really a rediscovery of an intuitive knowledge that Schweitzer had had as a child and that, he believed, every human likewise possesses. In his autobiography, he recollects how at the age of seven or eight a friend invited him to shoot birds with a slingshot. He reluctantly went along out of peer pressure. Just as his friend was about to shoot a beautifully chirping songbird sitting in a nearby tree, the church bells of his hometown started to ring. They made him aware of what he had been feeling all along: that there was something profoundly wrong about taking the life of that innocent bird. He shooed it away and ran home.

Once the idea of reverence for life had crystallized in Schweitzer's mind in 1915, he went on to formulate an ethics founded on this key thought. He gave his first major lecture on this topic four years later at the University of Uppsala in Sweden. Arguably the best presentation of his ethics can be found in his 1923 book *Die Philosophie der Zivilisation* (*The Philosophy of Civilization*).

Looking for a philosophical anchorage for this concept, Schweitzer opted for the Schopenhauerian "will to live," the irrepressible urge to survive, which human beings share with all creatures, even those that do not have self-awareness. As Patanjali states laconically in his *Yoga-Sûtra* (2.9), written probably around 200 A.D., "The will to live (*abhinivesha*) is rooted even in the sage." One may question whether Schweitzer succeeded in formulating a viable philosophical framework for his ethics, but with his concept of "reverence for life" he has clearly pinpointed a moral ideal that is at the core of the great religio-spiritual traditions of the world, notably Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism.

As Schweitzer observed, reverence for life is the fulcrum of a "complete" ethics: "All the goodness one displays toward a living organism is, at bottom, helping it to preserve and further its existence. . . . By ethical conduct toward all creatures, we enter into a spiritual relationship with the universe" (*The Teaching of Reverence for Life,* pp. 26–27). Schweitzer put it differently as follows: "Reverence for life means being seized by the unfathomable, forward-moving will which is inherent in all Being" (ibid., p. 32).

Thus, reverence for life takes full cognizance of the survival instinct operative in all of Nature's creatures. By extension, this ethical imperative also entails what in the Indic traditions is called *ahimsa,* or nonharming. Schweitzer seems to have misinterpreted the Indic teachings in that he assumed that they were largely life negative and that they primarily sought to guide practitioners to spiritual liberation, which he saw as a self-centered goal. He never fully appreciated those teachings, like Mahâyâna Buddhism, that have a full-fledged altruistic ethics, such as the conduct prescribed for the *bodhisattva*. The *bodhisattva,* who is intent on the enlightenment of all beings, is enjoined not only to abstain from harming others but to treat all living beings (throughout the cosmos and not merely on Earth) as he would his own mother, namely with the utmost kindness. In fact, Mahâyâna Buddhism


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can be said to have the most complete ethics based on reverence for life of any spiritual tradition.

Certainly, a *bodhisattva* would resonate completely with Schweitzer's understanding of reverence for life:

A man is truly ethical only when he obeys the compulsion to help all life which he is able to assist, and shrinks from injuring anything that lives. He does not ask how far this or that life deserves one's sympathy as being valuable, nor, beyond that, whether and to what degree it is capable of feeling. Life as such is sacred to him. He tears no leaf from a tree, plucks no flower, and takes care to crush no insect. If in summer he is working by lamplight, he prefers to keep his windows shut and breathe a stuffy atmosphere rather than see one insect after another fall with singed wings upon his table.

If he walks on the road after a shower and sees an earthworm which has strayed on to it, he bethinks himself that it must get dried up on the sun, if it does not return soon enough to ground into which it can burrow, so he lifts it from the deadly stone surface, and puts it on the grass. If he comes across an insect which has fallen into a puddle, he stops a moment in order to hold out a leaf or a stalk on which it can save itself. (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, chapter 26).

To this, however, a *bodhisattva* would add virtuous conduct, especially patience and generosity, which have numerous aspects. The *bodhisattva's* path involves vows and detailed disciplines, which constitute an exacting way of life dedicated to the grand ideal liberation *but* in kinship with all beings.

Most importantly, a *bodhisattva* approaches his altruistic conduct from the broadest possible perspective, which is the spiritual enlightenment, or liberation, of all beings. The purpose of alleviating a sentient being's present suffering or to protect its life from wanton destruction is merely the top layer of a far deeper concern, which is to work for its ultimate benefit—a notion that makes sense only in the context of an understanding that accepts re-embodiment (reincarnation). One can, however, easily rephrase this virtuous attitude in nonmetaphysical, nonreligious terms by speaking of a creature's potential, so that assisting it in whatever way could be seen as an endeavor to assist it in realizing its full potential, whatever that may be.

Clearly, to cultivate reverence for life at any level demands a degree of attentiveness, or mindfulness, that few people possess naturally. Schweitzer's call for an ethical "renaissance" leading to a "new humanity" has lost none of its urgency. Yet, this transformation will not occur automatically but only as a result of voluntary personal change on the part of very many people.

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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #21**

## What Is Green Yoga?

by Georg and Brenda Feuerstein

In our book *Green Yoga,* we make the point that traditional Yoga is inherently green, that is, environment friendly. Why, then, do we speak specifically of "Green Yoga"? The answer is obvious: because much of contemporary Yoga is anything but green. In fact, as part of our consumer society, it is thoroughly "commodified" and plays into the very mindset that Green Yoga criticizes and seeks to overcome. As we put it:

> We realize that few adherents of contemporary Yoga have, as yet, discovered Yoga's spiritual and moral teachings beyond the allure of the bodily postures. (p. 12)

However, we qualified the preceding statement by saying:

> But it would be too uncharitable to think that they could not do so in the future. Yoga has a power all its own, and not a few people have gradually moved from mere posture practice to a deep commitment to yogic morality and spirituality. (p. 12)

In other words, even die-hard "posturalists" are potentially able to find their way to Yoga's moral and spiritual wisdom and thus also to its profound environmental relevance. Indeed, if they were to carefully consider the matter of pollution—a central concern for environmentalism—they would quickly realize that their aspiration to achieve physical health and fitness cannot ultimately succeed as long as air, water, and earth are polluted. So, just from a purely physical perspective, they should be eager to embrace Green Yoga to help create a healtier environment.


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It is our view that a purely physical definition of health is far too narrow. For a more rounded definition, we must also consider our mental and spiritual wellbeing. After all, we are not merely bodies but embodied minds with access to what some psychologists regard as "transpersonal" (spiritual) states or realities. From a yogic perspective, health is the kind of wholeness that comes when we have discovered our "true nature," our spiritual core. This kind of wholeness will always escape us when we identify exclusively with the body or the mind as if they were independent "objects."

Thus, our argument goes far deeper than any preoccupation with one's bodily wellbeing. The environmental devastation we are witnessing today is, for us, primarily a moral issue, for two reasons:

*First,* we humans stand indicted as the principal cause of pollution and global warming. There is no one and nothing else to blame. Moreover, there is no one else who could possibly rectify the situation.

*Second,* our lifestyle is a source of endless suffering for countless nonhuman beings, who are unable to correct the wrong inflicted on them. They are the main victims of the Sixth Mass Extinction, which is underway today and which may yet prove our own undoing. Unless we humans change our ways, the repercussions of our inconsiderate lifestyle will inevitably lead to the destruction of the entire biosphere.

What must we do? First of all, **we must change our priorities**—our values, our philosophy, and then our attitudes and behavior. For practitioners of Yoga this means: we must make our Yoga practice *rigorously* green.

**Green Yoga is Yoga practiced *responsibly* at a time of unprecedented peril affection the entire biosphere of our planet.**

Green Yoga, then, is *spiritual* practice, with proper attention paid to the universal moral and spiritual values championed in traditional Yoga. The emphasis here is on the word "universal."

Unless we feel so moved, we need not adopt the idiosyncratic religious doctrines and symbols of traditional Yoga as current in Hinduism, Buddhism, or Jainism. Examples of historically conditioned doctrines are the belief in the existence of Râma, Krishna, Râdhâ, Shiva, Kâlî, or any other deity; the metaphysical belief that Spirit and Matter are eternally in antagonistic opposition; that there are exactly seven subtle centers (*cakra*) and 72,000 subtle channels (*nâdî*) in the body, or that sentient beings are subject to reincarnation. (Of course, reincarnation may yet become established fact; many already regard it as such.) It also is a nonuniversal belief, for instance, that one gains liberation simply by reciting the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* or some other sacred scripture; that the lotus posture removes all diseases, or that some sages practiced meditation while standing on one leg for a thousand years.

When speaking of universal values, we refer to fundamental insights into the human condition and behaviors based on them, notably that nonharming is better than harming, truthfulness better than lying, nonstealing better than stealing, kindness better than meanness, generosity better than


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miserliness, compassion better than callousness, patience better than impatience, love better than hatred, calmness better than anger, forgiveness better than vindictiveness, integrity better than corruption, and so on.

A universal value is also acknowledging the existence of transpersonal states and processes and the fact that we as humans are capable of self-transcendence and self-transformation, as well as transpersonal realizations through proper mind training. Green Yoga upholds these fundamental axioms of traditional Yoga.

As we explain in our book, **Green Yoga has two ethical pillars**:

*First,* the core ideal of Karma-Yoga (the path of self-transcending action), which is captured in the Sanskrit concept of *loka-samgraha*.

*Second,* the Mahâyâna Buddhist ideal of the *bodhisattva*, the practitioner who is committed to spiritual altruism through the cultivation of *bodhicitta*, that is, the mind focused on the liberation of all beings.

Closely related, these two ideals—one from the Hindu tradition, the other from Buddhism—both simultaneously communicate reverence for all life and the discipline of mindfulness. It is through the cultivation of mindfulness that we become fully aware of the intrinsic value of all sentient beings and how we can serve them or take them into account in any given moment. It is through reverence for all life that our practice of mindfulness become truly relevant here and now. Mindfulness and reverence relate to each other as the head does to the heart.

Green Yoga, like all traditional Yoga, is a sustained exercise in personal integration—the harmonization of head and heart, will and action, inside and outside.

When we really see the catastrophic damage we as humans and as individuals have done, and are doing, to the environment, our only sound moral choice is to change the way we think, emote, and behave. We must *live* our Yoga, and this must become more than a well-meaning slogan. **Today, living our Yoga means that we must live sustainably, bearing in mind the environment as a whole and future generations of human and nonhuman beings.** The living Earth itself is at stake.

Green Yoga is an opportunity to truly practice traditional Yoga in the context of our contemporary planet-wide crisis and to become a benign presence on Earth.

**Now carefully read the following excerpt from L. B. G. Tilak's monumental work on the *Gîtâ*. Please appreciate that this was written long ago and in Indian English.**


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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #22**

# The State and the Activities of the Siddha (Perfect)

(Excerpted from Chapter XII of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak's
*Śrî Bhagavadgîtâ-Rahasya or Karma-Sâstra, pp. 510ff., first published in 1908)**

That school of thought according to which nothing remains to be done by way of duty after a man has acquaired the Knowledge of the Brahman [or liberation] and his mind has become extremely equable and desireless, and according to which a Jñânin should on that account, give up entirely the painful and insipid activities of a transient worldly life with an apathetic frame of mind, can never think that the Karma-Yoga, or the mode of life appropriate to the state of a householder, is a science which deserves consideration. They admit that before a man takes Samnyâsa [or renunciation], his Mind must have been purified and Knowlede acquired; and they, therefore, admit that one must lead one's worldly life in a way which will purify the Mind and make it *sâttvika* [sattvic].

But, if one believes that leading the worldly life till death is foolish, and considers it to be the highest duty of everyone in this life to renounce the world (take Samnyâsa) as early as possible, Karma-Yoga has no independent importance; and the scholars who belong to the School of Renunciation do not trouble to deal with the qauestion of the doable and the not-doable in the state of a householder, beyond, concisely and when occasion arises, considering how one should lead one's worldly life, and advising that one should go up the ladder of the four states of life (*âśrama*) described by Manu and other philosophers and reach as quickly as possible the last step of that ladder, namely of Samnyâsa.

That is why Śrîmat Śamkarâcârya, who was the principal protagonist of the Path of Renunciation in the Kaliyuga [Dark Age], has in his commentary on the Gîtâ either belittled the statements in the Gîtâ advising Energism, or considered them to be merely laudatory, and drawn the ultimate conclusion of the Gîtâ that the whole of it has supported the doctrine of Abandonment of Action (*karma-samnyâsa*); or why other commentators have, consistently with their own doctrines, stated the import of the Gîtâ to be that the Blessed Lord [Krishna] advised Arjuna on the batle-field to follow only the renunciatory paths of Release, namely the path of pure Devotion, or the Pâtanjala-Yoga.

There is no doubt that the Knowledge of the Absolute Self [liberation] included in the Path of Renunciation is faultless; and that the equability of Reason, or the desireless state of mind produced


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by it, is acceptable to and admitted by the Gîtâ. Nevertheless, the opinion of the Samnyâsa school that one must entirely abandon Action in order to obtain Release is not acceptable to the Gîtâ; and I have shown in the last chapter that the most important doctrine laid down by the Gîtâ is, that the Jnânin must, even after the acquisition of Knowledge, perform all ithe activities of life, with the help of the feeling of indifference to the world and the equability of mind, which results from the Realisation of the Brahman.

When it is admitted that (i) the deletion of Knowledge-ful (*jnâna-yukta*) Action from the world will result in the world becoming blind and being destroyed; and that (ii) even Jnânins must desire-lessly perform all the duties of worldly life, and so give to ordinary people a living example of a good and pure life, since it is the desire of the Blessed Lord that the world should not be so destroyed and that its activities should go on without a hitch; and that (iii) this path is the most excellent and accept-able of all, it becomes necessary to consider in what way such a Jnânin performs the activities of his worldly life; because, as the life of such a Jnânin is nothing but an example set by him to other people, the consideration of that example automatically discloses to us the device sought by us for making a true discrimination between morality (*dharma*) and immorality (*adharma*), between the doable (*kârya*) and the non-doable (*akârya*) and between the duty (*karavya*) and the non-duty (*akartavya*). This is the important difference between the Path of Renunciation and the Path of Karma-Yoga.

That man whose Pure Reason (*vyavasâyâtmikâ buddhih*) has become capable of realising the identity, that "there is only one Âtman in all created things", on account of its having become steady by means of mental control, must also possess a Desire (*vâsanâ*) which is pure. And when his Practical Reason (*vyavasâyâtmikâ buddhih*) has in this way become pure, equable, mine-less (*nirmama*) and sinless, it is impossible that he should commit any sin or any Action obstructive of Release; because, (i) whatever Action is prompted by a pure desire, is bound to be pure, seeing that in the usual order of things, there is first a desire, and that such desire is followed by appropriate action; and (ii) whatever is pure, is promotive of Release.

We have, therefore in this way found such a preceptor as will give to us a visible reply, in the form of his own life, to the difficult question of the discrimination between what should be done and what should not be done (*karmâkarma-vicikitsâ*), or, between what is a duty and what is not a duty (*kâryâkârya-vyavasthiti*), (Tai. 1.11.4; Gî. 3.21) [= a reference to the *Taittirîya-Upanishad* and the *Gîtâ* respectively].

Such a preceptor was standing in life before Arjuna in the form of Śrî Krsna: and this preceptor has, after clearing the doubt in the mind of Arjuna that a Jnanin must abandon such Action as warfare etc. because it created bondage, given to Arjuna clear adice as to the device by which one can lead his life in this world, without committing sin and consistently with the science of the Absolute Self (*ad-hyâtma*), and induced him to fight.

But, it is not possible for every one to get such preceptors; and one also ought not to entirely depend on the external activities of such saints . . . It is, therefore, necessary to minutely examine the course of life of those Jnanins, who are examples to the whole world, and to consider what the true fundamental element in that course of life is. This subject is known as the Science of Karma-Yoga;


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and the state and the actions of the Jnanins mentioned above is the foundation of this science.

If all men in this world becme Knowers of the Atman and Karma-yogins in this way, there would be no necessity of a Science of Karma-Yoga. It is state in one place in the Narayaniya religion that:

*ekântino hi purushâ durlabhâ bahavo nripa* |
*yady ekântibhir âkîrnam jagat syât kurunananda* ||
*ahimsakair âtmavidbhih sarvabhûtahite rataih* |
*bhavet krtayugaprâptih âśîhkarmavivarjitâ* ||
*(Śân. [Śântiparvan of the Mahâbhârata] 348.62, 63)*

that is, "it is difficult to find many persons who fully and completely follow the Bhagavata doctrine, which is, 'Ekântika', that is, Activistic. If this world is filled with Self-knowing harmless Jnanins, following the Ekânta doctrine, who continually tax themselves for general welfare, all '*âśih-karma',* that is, desire-prompted or selfish Action, will disappear from this world, and the Krta-yuga [Golden Age] will come again!"; because, as all persons will be Jnânins in such a state of things, no one will cause harm to no one.

Not only that, but every one will always keep before his own mind in what the general welfare lies, and regulate his conduct accordingly, with a pure and desireless frame of mind.

It is the opinion of our philosophers [in India] that such a state of society existed at some very ancient date, and that it will recur again (Ma. Bha. San. 59.14); but Western scholars say on the authority of modern history, that though such a state of things never existed before, it is possible that such a state of things may come into existence, sometime or other in the future, as a result of the advancement of mankind.

However, as I am not now concerned with history, I may without being contradicted say that according to both opinions, every person in this state, which is supposed to be the highest or the most perfect state of society, will be fully a Jnânin, and every Action of his is bound to be pure, beneficial, and moral, or the pinnacle of dutifulness.

The well-known English biologist [Herbert] Spencer [1820–1903] has expressed this opinion at the end of his work on Ethics [*Data of Ethics*]; and he says that the same doctrine had been formerly laid down by the ancient Greek philosophers. For example, the Greek philosopher Plato says in his work that that Action which appears to be proper to the philosopher must be beneficial or just; that ordinary persons do not understand these principles of Ethics; and that they must, therefore, look upon the decisions of philosophes as authoritative.

Another Greek philosopher—none other than Aristotle—says in his book on ethics (3,4) that the decision given by a Jnânin [i.e., a philosopher] is always correct, because he has understood the


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true principle; and this decision or conduct of a Jnânin is exemplary for others.

A third Greek philosopher named Epicurus in describing such an exemplary and highly cultivated Jnânin says that he is "peaceful, equable, and probably always joyful like the Parameśvara; and that there is not the slightest harm done by him to other people, or by other people to him". [*Footnote by Tilak*: Epicurus held the virtuous state to be a "tranquil, undisturbed, innocuous, non-competitive fruition, which approached most nearly to the perfect happiness of the God", who "neither suffered vexation in themselves nor caused vexation to others".]

My readers will realise how similar this description is to the description given in the Bhagavadgita of the Steady-in-Mind (*sthitaprajña*), of the one who is beyond the three constituents (trigunâtîta), or of the highest Devotee (*parama-bhakta*), or the Brahman-merged (*brahma-bhûta*). In the Bhagavadgîtâ, the characteristics of the Sthitaprajña have been mentioned in three or four places in the following words, namely: *"yasmân nodvijate loko lokân nodvijate ca yah"* (Gî. 12.15), i.e., "one of whom people do not get tired, and who is not tired of people"; or, who is always cheerful and always free from the doubles of joy and sorrow, fear and dislike, happiness and unhappiness and is always content with himself (*"âtmany evâtmanâ tustah",* Gî. 14.23); or, one for whom praise or adverse criticism, honour or dishonour is just the same, and who, realising the identity of one Âtman in all created things (Gî. 18.54), does his duty with an equable frame of mind, without Attachment, courageously, and enthusiastically; or, is *'samalostâśma-kâñcana"* (Gî. 14.24), [i.e., "one who looks upon a lump of earth and gold as the same"]; and this state is known as the state of the Perfect (*siddhâvasthâ*) or the Brâhmi-state. The Yoga-Vâsistha and other works refer to this state as the state of being free from re-birth (*jîvanmuktâvasthâ*).

As this state is extremely difficult of accomplishment, the German philosopher [Immanuel] Kant says that the description given by Greek philosophers of such a state is not of the state of any living being; but that they have personified the 'Pure Desire', which is the root of all Ethics, in order to impress the elements of pure morality on the minds of people; and have created this picture of a super-Jñânin and moral person out of their own imagination. But our philosophers say that such a state of things is not an imaginary state and that is can be accompished by man in this life by mental control and effort; and we have seen actual examples of such persons in our country.

Nevertheless, such a thing is not a matter of ordinary occurrence, and there is possibly only one among thousands who makes any effort in this direction; and it is clearly stated in the Gîtâ that only one out of the thousand who make an effort in this direction ultimately attains this beatific ideal state at the end of innumerable lives (Gî. 7.3).

However difficult of accomplishment this state of a Sthitaprajña (*sthitaprajñâvasthâ*) or this state of being free from re-birth (*jîvan-muktâvasthâ*) may be, it follows from the description of such a man, which has been given above, that the man who has once accomplished this ultimate state does not need to be taught any laws about what should be done or should not be done, i.e., of Ethics; because as the purest, the most equable and the most sinless frame of mind is the essence of morality, laying down laws of Ethics for such a Sthitaprajña would be as unreasonable as imagining that the Sun is surrounded by darkness and holding up a torch for it.


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There may be a doubt as to whether or not a particular person has reached this highest of states. But when once it has been established by whatever means that a particular person has reached this state, no proposition is possible, except the metaphysical propostiion mentioned above regarding tyhe merit or de-merit of his actions. Just as regal authority is vested in one independent person or collection of persons . . ., so also are the Sthitaprajñas vested with authority in the kingdom of Ethics.

No Desire exists in their minds; and therefore they are not induced to perform Action by any motive, except the fact that it is a duty enjoined by the Śâstras; and thefore the words *sin* or *meritorious action*, *morality* or *immorality* can never be applied to the conduct of such persons, who are filled by a stainless and pure desire. They have gone beyond the bounds of sin and merit. Śamkarâcârya has said that

*nistraigunye pathi vicaratâm ko vidhih ko nisedhah*

that is, "laws dictating what is proper and what is improper do not apply to persons who have gone beyond the three constituents [i.e., *sattva, rajas,* and *tamas*]"; and Buddhist writers have said that "just as the purest diamond does not require to be polished, so are the actions of that person who has reached the state of Absolution (*nirvâna*) not reqired to be limited by rules of conduct (Milindhapraśna 4.5.7)".

This is the import of the statement made by Indra to Pratardana in the Kausîtakyupanisad (Kausî. 3.1) that the Self-knower (*âtma-jñânin*) is "untouched by the sins of matricide, patricide, or infanticide"; or of the statement in the Gîtâ (Gî. 18.17) that "a man who has totally lost the feeling of individuation (*ahamkâra*) is untouched by sin or merit even if he kills others. (See also Pañcadaśî 14.16 and 17; and the same principle has been repeated in the Buddhistic work called *Dhammapada* stanzas 294 and 295.)

Nay, according to me, the statement of St. Paul, the disciple of the Lord Christ, in the New Testament of the Bible that "all things are lawful for me" (1 Cor. 6.12; Romans 8.2) or the stateent of St. John that "it is not possible that any sin is committed by those who have become the sons (perfect disciples) of the Lord" (John 1.3.9) conveys the same import.

Those who have got into the habit of arriving at a decision about morality by merely considering the external Action, without attaching proper importance to mental purity, may consider this doctrine as strange; and some people perversely interpret "not bound by rules of right or wrong" as meaning "one who commits any wrong he likes" and distort the doctrine mentioned above by me as meaning "the Sthitaprajña is at liberty to commit any sin he likes". But just as the fact that a blind man does not see a pillar is not the fault of the pillar, so does the fact of these objectors, who have become blind because they support a particular doctrine, not clearly understand the meaning of the doctrine mentioned above, not become a fault of the doctrine.

Even the Gîtâ accepts the position that the purity of anybody's mind has first to be tested by his external actions; and the metaphysical sicence does not wish to apply the above-mentioned doctrine to those imperfect persons, the purity of whose mind remains to be tested even a little by that test.


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But the case is different with the man who has reached the state of perfection and whose mind has undoubtedly become entirely merged in the Brahman and infinitely desireless; and although some Action of his might appear improper from the ordinary point of view, yet as it is admitted that his mind is perfeclty pure and equable, it follows that such Action, however it appears to the ordinary observer, must be essentially sinless; or, it must have been committed for some ethically correct reason and is not likely to be founded on avarice or immorality like the actions of ordinary people.

The same is the reason why Abraham in the Bible was not guyilty of the sin of attempting infanticide, though he was about to kill his son; or, why Buddha did not incur the sin of murder when his father-in-law died as a result of his curse; or, why Paraśurâma was not guilty of matricide, though he killed his own mother.

And the advice given in the Gîtâ to Arjuna by the Blessed Lord [Krishna] that "if your mind is pure and stainless, you will not be guilty of the sin of having killed your ancestor or your peceptore, though you may happen to kill Bhîsna and Drona in warfare according to the duty of the Ksatriyas and without having any hope of any benefit to be derived thereby, because in such circumstances you have become merely an instrument for carrying into effect the desire of the Parameśvara [i.e., the supreme Lord] (Gî. 11.33)" is based on the same principle. We see in ordinary life that if a millionaire snatches away money from a beggar, the millionnaire is not called a thief, but it is believed that the beggar has committed some wrong and that on that account the millionaire hs punished him.

This argument applies still more appropriately, or more fully, to the conduct of the Sthitaprajña, the [Buddhist] *arahat*, or the devotee of the Blessed Lord; because the Reason of the millionaire may on occasion falter, but it is a settled fact that such emotions cannot touch the Reason of the Sthitaprajña. As the Parameśvara, the Creator of the universe, is untouched by sin or merit, notwithstanding that He performs all Actions, so also is the state of these saints, who have become merged in the Brahman, always holy and sinless.

It may even be said that laws of conduct are framed on the basis of the Actions performed by such persons on previous occasions, of their own free will; and on that account, these saints become the fathers of those laws of behaviour and are never the slaves of them. Such illustrations are come across not only in the Vedic religion but also in the Buddhistic and Christian religions; and this principle was accepted even by the ancient Greek philosophers; and in the present age, Kant has in his book on the science of Ethics proved this by conclusive reasons.

When it has thus been proved what the unpollutable original spring or the stainless model of all rules of Morality is, such persons as want to scrutinise the fundamental principles of Ethics or of the doctrine of Energism (*karmayoga*) must minutely examine the lives of such holy and stainless saints.

That is why Arjuna has asked Śrî Krsna the following questions in the Bhagavadgîtâ, namely: *"sthitadhîh kim prabhâseta kim âsîta vrajeta kim"* (Gî. 2.54), i.e., "how does the Sthitaprajña speak, sit, move about?"; or, in the fourteenth chapter, *"kair lingais trîngunân etân atîto bhavati prabho, kimâcârah"* (Gî. 14.21), i.e., "how does a man go beyond the three constituents (beomce a *trigunâtîta*), what is his behaviour, and how is such a man to be recognised?"


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As an assayer tests the golden ornament which has been taken to him for examination by comparing it with a sample piece of hundre carat gold in his possession, so also is the behaviour of the Sthitaprajña a test for deciding between the duty and the non-duty, the just and the unjust; and the implied meaning of these questions is that the Blessed Lord should explain to Arjuna what that test was.

Some persons say that the descriptions which have been given by the Blessed Lord [Krishna] of the state of the Sthitaprajña or of the Trigunâtîta in reply to this question are of Jnânins following the Path of Renunciation and not the Karma-Yoga; becease it is with reference to such persons that the adjective *nirâśraya* [i.e., "homeless"] (Gî. 4.20) has been used in the Gîtâ; and in the twelfth chapter, where the description of the words *sarvârambhaparityâgî* [i.e., "he who has renounced all commencement (of action)"] (Gî. 12.16) and *aniketah* [i.e., "he who is without abode"] (Gî. 12.19) have been used clearly.

But the words *nirâśraya* and *aniketah* do not mean "one who does not remain in a home but roams about in a foest", and they must be taken as synonymous with *anâśritah karmaphalam* [i.e., "not taking recourse to the fruit of action"] (Gî. 6.1), that is to say, as meaning "one who does not take shelter in the Fruit of Action", or, "one whose mental home is not in that Fruit", as will be clearly seen from my commentaries on the translation of those respective verses.

Besides, it is stated in the description itself of the Sthitaprajña that "he moved about among the objects of pleasure, keeping control over his organs", that is, he performs Actions desirelessly (Gî. 2.64); and, in the stanza which contains the word *nirâśrayah* occurs also the description *karmany abhipravrtto'pi naiva kimcit karoti sah,* that is, "he is free from and untouched by all Actions, though he performs them".

The same argument must be applied to the use of the word *aniketah* in the twelfth chapter; because in that chapter, after having praised the abandonment of the Fruit of Action (not the Abandoment of Action), the Blessed Lord has gone on to describe the characteristics of Hid devotees in order to explain what peace (*śânti*) is obtained by performing Action after abandoining the Hope for Fruit (*phalâśa*); and in the same way, a description has been given in the eighteenth chapter of a person who has been merged in the Brahman in order to explain how peace is obtained by performing Actions without being attached to the Fruit of Action (Gî. 18.50).

It, therefore, becomes necessary to come to the conclusion that these descriptions are not of persons who follow the Path of Renunciation but of Karma-yogins. It is not that the Knowledge of the Brahman, the peace of mind, the Self-identification (*âtmaupamya*), or the Desirelessness of Mind, of the Karma-yogin Sthitaprajña is different from those of the Samnyâsin-Sthitaprajña. As both are perfect Knowers of the Brahman, the mental frame and the peace of mind are the same in either case; but the one is merely engrossed in Peace (*śânti*) and does not care for anything else, whereas the other is continually bringing into use his peace of mind and his Self-identification in his activites of ordinary life as occasion arises.

This is the important difference between the two from the point of view of Karma. Therefore, that Sthitaprajña whose personal conduct has to be taken as an example for determining what is right


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and what is wrong in ordinary life must be one who performs Action and not one who has abandoned Action ir is a beggar (*bhiksu*).

The sum and substance of the advice given to Arjuna in the Gîtâ is "it is not necessary to give up Action, nor can you give it up; but Realise the identity of the Brahman and the Âtman and keep your pure Reason (*vyavasâyâtmikâ buddhi*) equable like that of a Karma-yogin, so that your Practical Reason (*vyavasâyâtmikâ buddhi*) will thereby also beocme pure, mine-less, and saintly and you will not be caught in the bondage of Karma; and that is why in explaining to Jâjali the principle of Ethics embodied in the stanza quoted at the beginning of this chapter, namely "that man who by his Actions and by his speech is continually engrossed in the welfare of toehrs and who is always a friend of others may alone be said to have understood what morality (*dharma*) is" Tulâdhâra has mentioned Karma side by side with Speech and Mind and even before mentioning them.

It is not necessary to exlain principles of Ethics in detail to that man whose mind has become equable towards all created things, like that of a Karma-yogin Sthitaprajña or a Jîvanmukta and all whose selfish interests have been merged in the interests of others. He may be said to have become self-enlightend or a *buddha*.

As Arjuna had reached that stage, it was not necessary to give him any advice beyond stating "make your mind equable and steady and instead of falling in the futile mistake of giving up Action make your mind similar to that of the Sthitaprajña and peform all Action which has befallen you according to your status in life".

Yet, as this Yoga in the shape of equability of mind cannot, as has been stated above, be attained by every one in one life, the life of a Sthitaprajña must be a little more minutely examined and explained for the benefit of ordinary people. But in making this disquisition, one must also bear in mind that the Sthitaprajña whom we are going to consider is not a man living in a society which has reached the perfect state of the Krta-yuga [Golden Age] but is one who has to live in a society in this Kali-yuga [Dark Age] in which almost all people are steeped in their own selfish interests.

Because however great and complete the Knowledge of a man may be and whatever the state of equability of Mind which he has reached, it will not do if he adopts the practice of harmlessness, kindness, peacefulness, forgiveness etc., which are permanent virtues of the highest order, in dealing with persons whose minds are impure and who are caught within the toils of Desire, Anger etc.

It need not be said that the rules of Right and Wrong applicable to a society in which the majority is of avaricious persons must be at least somewhat different from the rules of Right and Wrong and of Absolute Ethics applicable to a society in which every person is a Sthitaprajña; otherwise saints will have to leave this world and evil-doers will be the rulers everywehre.

This does not mean that saints must give up their equable frame of mind; but there are kinds and kinds of equability of mind. It is stated in the Gîtâ that the hearts of saints are equal towards *brâhmane gavi hastini* (Gî. 5.18), i.e., "Brahmins, cows, and elephants". But if on that account someone feeds a Brahmin with the grass which has been brought for the cow or feeds the cow with the food which has been cooked for the Brahmin shall we call him a wise man? If persons following the School


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of Renunciation do not attach any importance to this quesiton, the same cannot be done by people who follow the Karma-Yoga.

The Sthitaprajña lives his life in this world taking into account what the nature of Right and Wrong was in the perfect state of the Krta-yuga [Golden Age] and deciding what changes are necssary in those rules in this world of selfish persons having regard to the difference of Time and Place; and it will be clear from what has been stated in the second chapter above that this is the most difficult question in Karma-Yoga.

Saints perform their duties in this life apathetically and only for the benefit of such selfish people instead of getting angry with them or allowing their own equability of mind to change on account of their avaricious tendencies.

Bearing this principle in mind, Śrî Samartha Râmadâsa has [furnished in his work *Dâsabodha*] . . . a description of the activities performed by such Sthitaprajñas or saints for social welfare with indifference to the world, or desirelessly, and with the intention of instilling wisdom into such people (Dâsa. 11.10; 12.8-10; 15.2), and he has stated later on . . . that one should thoroughly understand and grasp the traditions, stories, stratagems, devices, circumstances, intentness of pursuit, inferences, cleverness, diplomacy, forbearance, acuteness, generosity, metaphysical Knowlede, devotion, aloofness, indifference to the world, daringness, assiduity, determination, firmness, equability, discrimination, and numerous other qualities of such Jñânins (Dâsa. 18.2).

But, as such disinterested persons have to deal with avaricious persons, the ultimate advice of Śrî Samartha is:

> Meet boldness with boldness | impertinence by impertinence |
> villainy by villainy | must be met ||
>
> (Dâsa. 19.9.30)

In short, when a man deswcends from the state of perfection to ordinary life, it is undoubtedly necessary to make some changes in the rules of Right or Wrong which apply to the highest state.

To this position, materialistic philosophers raise the following objection, namely: if when one descends from the perfect state into ordinary society, one has to deal with many things with discrimination and modify Absolute Ethics to a certain extent, where is the permanence of Ethical principles and what becomes of the axiom *dharmo nityah,* i.e., “Morality is immutable,” which has been enunciated by Vyâsa in the Bhârata-Sâvitrî. They say that the immutability of Ethics from the point of view of metaphysics is purely imaginary and that those are the only true rules of Ethics which come into existence consistently with the state of society at particular periods of time on the basis of the principle of “the greatest good of the greatest number”.

But this argument is not correct. Just as the scientific definition of a straight line or of a perfect circle does not become faulty or purposeless because no one can draw a straight line without breadth or a faultless circumference of a circle as defined in geometry, so also is the case with simple and pure rules of Ethics.

Besides, unless one has determined the absolutely pure form of anything, it is not possible to


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bring about improvements in the various imperfect forms of it which we come across in life or to ascertain the relative worth of the various forms after careful consideration; and that is why the assayer first decides what is pure hundred carat gold.

Persons who live only according to the times and without taking into account the absolute form of Ethical principles will be in the same position as sailors on a ship who guide the rudder on the boundless ocean considering ly the waves and the wind and without taking into account the compass which shows the cardinal directions or the Polar star.

Therefore, even considering everything from the materialistic point of view, it is necessary to first fix some principle of Ethics which is unchangeable and permanent like the Polar star; and once this necessity has been admitted, the entire materialistic argument falls to the ground. . .

Just as one cannot from the fact that the shade of an object cast by the Sun's rays is flat on a surface but is undulating on and undulating surface draw the inference that the shae must be originally undulating, so can one not from the fact that one does not come across the purest form of Ethics in a society of unprinciples persons draw the inference that the imperfect state of Ethics which we come across in an imperfect society is the principal or the original form of Ethics. The faults here is not of Ethids but of the society; therefore, those who are wise do not quarrel with pure and permanent laws of Ethics but apply their efforts towards elevating society, so as to bring it to the ultimate highest state.

Although our philosophers have mentioned some exceptions to the permanent laws of Ethics in dealing with avaricioius persons in society as being unavoidable, they also mention penances for acting according to such exceptions. . .

I have thus explained that the true foundation of Ethics is the frame of mind and the mode of life of the Sthitaprajña Jñânin (the Steady-in-Mind scient); and why, although laws of Ethics to be dduced from the same are permanent and immutable in themselves, they have got to be varied in an imperfect state of society; and how and why the immutability of fundamental laws of Ethics is not affected though these laws may be varied in that way. . .

**Even though Tilak's style is rather tortuous, or overly ponderous, he has some important things to say. To ensure that you have understood his arguments, you might want to summarize all the salient points made.**

**Next read the following excerpts from Swami Vivekananda's discourse on Karma-Yoga, delivered in Los Angeles on January 4, 1900.**


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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #23**

# Work and Its Secret

by Swami Vivekananda

(Excerpt from "Work and its Secret,"
*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,* vol. II, pp. 1–9)

One of the greatest lessons I have learnt in my life is to pay as much attention to the means of work as to its end. . .

Proper attention to the finishing, strengthening, of the means is what we need. With the means all right, the end must come. We forget that it is the cause that produces the effect; the effect cannot come by itself; and unless the causes are exact, proper, and powerful, the effect will not be produced. Once the ideal is chosen and the means determined, we may almost let go the ideal, because we are sure it will be there, when the means are perfected. . .

We also read this in the Gita and learn that we have to work, constantly work with all our power; to put our whole mind in the work, whatever it be, that we are doing. At the same time, we must not be attached. That is to say, we must not be drawn away from the work by anything else; still, we must be able to quite the work whenever we like.

If we examine our own lives, we find that the greatest cause of sorrow is this: we take up something, and put our whole energy on it—perhaps it is a failure and yet we cannot give it up. We know that it is hurting us, that any further clinging to it is simply bringing misery on us; still, we cannot tear ourselves away from it. The bee came to sip the honey, but its feet stuck to the honey-pot and it could not get away. Again and again, we are finding ourselves in that state. That is the whole secret of existence. Why are we here? We cane here to sip the honey, and we find our hands and feet sticking to it. we are cauhgt, though we came to catch. We came to enjoy; we are being enjoyed. We came to rule; we are being ruled. We came to work; we are being worked. All the time, we find that. And this comes into every detail of our life. We are being worked upon by other minds, and we are always struggling to work on other minds. We want to enjoy the pleasures of life; and they eat into our vitals. We want to get everything from nature, but we find in the long run that nature takes everything from us—depletes us, and casts us aside. . .

Attachment is the source of all our pleasures now. We are attached to our friends, to our relatives; we are attached to our intellectual and spiritual works; we are attached to external objects, so that we get pleasure from them. What, again, brings misery but this very attachment. We have to detach ourselves to earn joy. . .


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There are men who are never attracted by anything. They can never love, they are hard-hearted and apathetic; they escape most of the miseries of life. But the wall never feels misery, the wall never loves, is never hurt; but it is the wall, after all. . .

Ask nothing; want nothing in return. Give what you have to give; it will come back to you—but do not think of that now, it will come back multiplied a thousandfold—but the attention must not be on that. Yet have the power to give: give, and there it ends. Learn that the whole of life is giving, that nature will force you to give. so, give willingly. . .

A river is continually emptying itself into the ocean and is continually filling up again. Bar not the exit into the ocean. The moment you do that, death seizes you.

I know the difficulties. Tremendous they are, and ninety per cent of us become discouraged and lose heart, and in our turn, often become pessimists and cease to believe in sincerity, love, and all that is grand and noble. So, we find men who in the freshness of their lives have been forgiving, kind, simple, and guileless, become in old age lying masks of men. Their minds are a mass of intricacy. . .

It is very difficult, but we can overcome the difficulty by constant practice. We must learn that nothing can happen to us, unless we make ourselves susceptible to it. . .

We are all the time, from our childhood, trying to lay the blame upon something outside ourselves. We are always standing up to set right other people, and not ourselves. . .

We only get what we deserve. It is a lie when we say, th eowrld is bad and we are good. It can never be so. It is a terrible lie we tell ourselves.

This is the first lesson to learn: be determined not to curse anything utside, not to lay the blame upon any one outside, but be a man, stand up, lay the blame on yourself. You will find, that is always true. Get hold of yourself. . .

We are to take care of ourselves—that much we can do—and give up attending to others for a time. Let us perfect the means; the end will take care of itself. For the world can be good and pure, only if our lives are good and pure. It is an effect, and we are the means. Therefore, let us purify ourselves. Let us make ourselves perfect.


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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #24**

# Karma and Its Effect on Character

by Swami Vivekananda

(Excerpt from *Karma-Yoga and Bhakti-Yoga*, pp. 3–12)

All action is karma. Technically this word also means the effects of actions. In connexion with metaphysics it sometimes means the effects of which our past actions were the causes. But in karma-yoga we have simply to do with the word *karma* as meaning work.

The goal of man is knowledge. That is the one great ideal placed before us by Eastern philosophy. Not pleasure, but knowldege, is the goal of man. Pleasure and happiness come to an end. . . As pleasure and pain pass before his soul, they leave upon it different pictures, and the result of these combined impressions is what is called a man's "character" . . . Were one to study the great characters the world has produced, I dare say it would be found, in the vast majority of cases, that miserty taught them more than happiness, poverty taught them more than wealth, blows brought out their inner fire more than praise.

Now knowledge, again, is inherent in man. No knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside. What we say a man "knows" should, in strict psychological language, be what he discovers or unveils, what a man "learns" is really what he discovers by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge. We say that Newton discovered gravitation. Was it sitting anywhere in a corner waiting for him? It ws in his own mind. The right time came and he found it out. . .

Karma in its effect on character is the most tremendous power that man has to deal with. Man is, as it were, a centre and is attracting all the pwoers of the universe towards himself, and in this centre is fusing them all and again sending them off in a big current. . .

All the actions that we see in the world, all the movements in human society, all the works that we have around us, are simply the display of thought, the manifestation of the will of man. Machines, instruments, cities, ships, men-of-war—all these are simply the manifestation of the will of man; and this will is caused by character, and character is manufactured from karma. As is the karma, so is the manifestation of the will. . .

Man works with various motives; there cannot be work without motive. Some people want to


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get fame and they work for fame. Others want money and they work for money. Some want to have power and they work for power. Others want to get to heaven and they work for that. . .

Now let us consider work for work's sake. There are some who are really the sale of the earth, who work for work's sake, who do not care for name or fame or even to go heaven. They work just because good will come of it. There are others who do good to the poor and help mankind from still higher motives, because they believe in doing good and they love good . . . We must do the work and find out the motive that prompts us; and in the firest years we shall find that almost without exception our motives are selfish. But gradually this selfishness will melt through persistence, and at last will come the time when we shall be able to do really unselfish work. We may all hope that some day or other, as we struggle through the paths of life, there will come a time when we shall become perfectly unselfish; and the moment we attain to that, all our powers will be concentrated and the knowledge which is ours will be manifest.

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #25**

## The Secret of Work

by Swami Vivekananda

(Excerpt from *Karma-Yoga and Bhakti-Yoga,* pp. 32–44)

Helping others physically, by removing their physical needs, is indeed great; but the help is greater according as the need is greater and the help is more far-reaching. If a man's wants can be removed for an hour, it is helping him indeed; if his wants can be removed for a year, it will be rendering him more help; but if his wants can be removed for ever, it is surely the greatest help that can be given him.

Spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can destroy our miseries for ever; any other knowledge removes wants only for a time. It is only with the knowledge of the Spirit that the root cause of want is destroyed for ever; so helping man spiritually is the highest help that can be given him. . .

Let things work; let the brain centres work; work incessantly, but let not a ripple conquer the mind. Work as if you were a stranger in this land, a sojourner. Work incessantly, but do not bind yoruselves; bondage is terrible. This world is not our habitation, but only a stage through which we are passing. . .


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The whole gist of this teaching is that you should work as a master, not as a slave; work incessantly, but do not do slave's work. do you not see how everybody works? Nobody can be altogether at rest. Ninety-nine per cent of mankind work like slaves, and the result is misery; it is all selfish work. Work through freedom! Work through love! The word *love* is very difficult to understand. Love never comes until there is feredom. There is no true love possible in the slave . . . And here is a test: Every act of love brings happiness; there is no act of love which does not bring peace and blessedness as its reaction. . .

To attain this non-attachment [of Yoga] is almost a life-work; but as soon as we have reached this point we have attained the goal of love and become free. The bondage of nature falls away from us, and we see nature as it is: it forges no more chains for us. . .

If working as slaves results in selfishness and attachment, working as masters of our own minds gives rise to the bliss of non-attachment. . .

Now you see what karma-yoga menas: even at the point of death to help anyone, without asking questions. Be cheated millions of times and never ask a question, and never think that you are doing good. Never vaunt of your gifts to the poor or expect their gratitude, but rather be grateful to them for giving you the occasion of practising charity towards them. Thus it is plain that to be an ideal householder is a much more difficult task than to be an ideal sannyâsin; the true life of action is indeed as hard as, if not harder than, the true life of renunciation.

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #26**

## What is Duty?

by Swami Vivekananda

(Excerpt from *Karma-Yoga and Bhakti-Yoga,* pp. 45ff.)

It is necessary in the study of karma-yoga to know what duty is. If I have to do something, I must first know that it is my duty, and then I can do it. The idea of duty, again, is different in different nations. . .

The term *duty*, like every other universal, abstract term, is impossible to define clearly; we can only get an idea of it by knowing its practical operations and results . . . The ordinary idea of duty everywhere is that every good man follows the dictates of his conscience . . . Let us do the duty which is ours by birth; and when we have done that, let us do the duty which is ours by our position in life and in society . . . No man is to be judged by the mere nature of his duties, but all should be judged


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by the manner and the spirit in which they perform them.

Later on we shall find that even this idea of duty undergoes change, and that the greatest work is done only when there is no selfish motive to prompt it. Yet it is work through the sense of duty that leds us to work without any idea of duty. Then work becomes worship—nay, something higher; then work is done for its own sake. . .

The only way to grow is to do the duty near at hand, and thus go on gathering strength till the highest state is reached.

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #27**

## The Ideal of Karma-Yoga

by Swami Vivekananda

(Excerpt from *Karma-Yoga and Bhakti-Yoga,* pp. 102ff.)

Karma-yoga is the attaining through unselfish work of that freedom which is the goal of all human nature. Every selfish action, therefore, retards our reaching the goal, and every unselfish action takes us towards the goal. That is why the only definition that can be given of morality is this: That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral. . .

Karma-yoga, therefore, is a system of discipline aiming at the attainment of freedom through unselfish and good works. The karma-yogi need not believe in any religious doctrine whatever. He need not believe even in God, may not ask what his soul is or think of any metaphysical speculation. He has his own special aim of realizing selflessness; and he has to work it out himself. Every moment of his life must be realization, because he has to solve by mere work, without the help of doctrine or theory, the very same problem to which the jñâni applies his reason and inspiration and the bhakta his love.

Now comes the next question: What is this work? What is this doing good to the world? Can we do good to the world? In an absolute sense, no; in a relative sense, yes. No permanent or everlasting good can be done to the world; if it could be done, the world would not be this world. . .

This world's wheels within wheels are a terrible mechanism. As soon as we put our hands in it, we are caught and we are gone. We all think that when we have done a certain duty we shall be at rest; but before we have done a part of that duty another is already waiting. We are all being dragged along by this mighty, complex world-machine. There are only two ways out of it. One is to give up all desires. that is very easy to say, but almost impossible to do. I do not know whether in twenty millions of men one can do that. The other way is to plunge into the world and learn the secret of work, and


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that is the way of karma-yoga. Do not fly away from the wheels of the world-machine, but stand inside it and learn the secret of work. Through proper work done inside, it is also possible to come out. Through this machine iself is the way out.

**Next carefully ponder the following statements by "Mahatma Gandhi."**

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #28**

## Action

by M. K. Gandhi

(Excerpted from the writings of "Mahatma" Gandhi by R. K. Prabhu and U. R. Rao, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi,* pp. 406; 424f.)

I do not know whether I am a Karmayogi or any other Yogi. I know that I cannot live without work. I crave to die with my hand at the spinning-wheel. If one has to establish communion with God through some means, why not through the spinning wheel? Him who worships Me, says the lord in the Gita, I guide along the right path and see to his needs. . .

My ethics not only permit me to claim but require me to own kinship with not merely the ape but the horse and the sheep, the lion and the leopard, the snake and the scorpion. Not so needs these kinsfolk regard themselves.

The hard ethics which rule my life, and I hold ought to rule that of every man and woman, imposes this unilateral obligation upon us. And it is so imposed because man alone is made in the image of God. That some of us do not recognize that status of ours makes no difference, except that then we do not get the benefit of the status, even as a lion brought up in the company of sheep may not know his own status and, therefore, does not receive its benefits; but it belongs to him nevertheless, and, the moment he realizes it, he begins to exercise his dominion over the sheep. But no sheep masquerading as a lion can ever attain the leonine status. . .

I believe myself to be saturated with *ahimsa*—non-violence. *Ahimsa* and Truth are as my two lungs. I cannot live without them. But I see every moment, with more and more clearness, the


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immense power of *ahimsa* and the littleness of man. . .

Even the forest-dweller [i.e., the sage who has withdrawn into the wilderness] cannot be entirely free from violence, in spite of his limitless compassion. With every breath he commits a certain amount of violence. The body itself is a house of slaughter, and, therefore, *moksha* and Eternal Bliss consist in perfect deliverance from the body, and, therefore, all pleasure, save the joy of *moksha,* is evanescent, imperfect. That being the case, we have to drink, in daily life, many a bitter draught of violence. . .

## ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #29

# Self-rule

by M. K. Gandhi

(Excerpted from the writings of "Mahatma" Gandhi by R. K. Prabhu and U. R. Rao, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi,* pp. 412f.)

It has often been urged that India cannot adopt Swadeshi [self-rule], in the economic life at any rate. Those who advance this objection do not look upon Swadeshi as a rule of life. With them it is a mere patriotic effort—not to be made if it involve any self-denial. Swadeshi, as defined here, is a religious discipline to be undergone in utter disregard of the physical discomfort it may cause to individuals . . . A Swadeshist will learn to do without hundreds of things which today he considers necessary. . .

I would urge that Swadeshi [self-rule] is the only doctrine consistent with the law of humility and love. . .

The motive will determine the quality of the act. I may serve my family regardless of the sufferings I may cause to others. As, for instance, I may accept an employment which enables me to extort money from people. I enrich myself thereby and then satisfy many unlwaful demands of the family. Here I am neither serving the family nor the State. . .

I hold it to be sinful for me to refuse to buy the cloth spun and woven by the needy millions of India's paupers and to buy foreign cloth although it may be superior in quality to the Indian hand-spun. . .

**Ask yourself how Gandhi's statements relate to Karma-Yoga in light of your own understanding of Karma-Yoga. The "For Reflection" questions in this lesson will include questions about Gandhi's perspective.**


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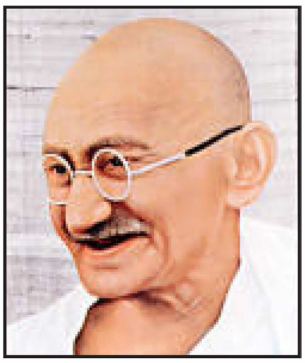
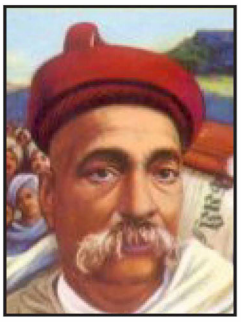


"When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the *Bhagavadgita.* I find a verse here and a verse there and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies—and my life has been full of external tragedies—and if they have left no visible, no indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teachings of the *Bhagavadgita.*"

—M. K. Gandhi
*Young India,* pp. 1078-1079



Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who the British called "Father of Indian Unrest," was a freedom fighter and social reformer

"The Gîtâ is . . . essentially a treatise on Right or Proper Action (Karma-Yoga); and that is why it has been given a position of supreme importance in all Vedic treatises."

—B. G. Tilak
*Srimadbhagavadgîtâ Rahasya,* p. xxv

Vinobha Bhave, a collaborator of "Mahatma" Gandhi, was the founder of the Bhoodan (land gift) movement

"In karma-yoga one surrenders the fruit; but the question arises: does the fruit come to one, nevertheless, or does it not? Thus the Third Chapter says that the karma-yogi, by giving up the fruit of his action, does not lose it, but paradoxically enough gains it in infinite measure."

—Vinoba Bhave
*Discourses on Gita, http://www.hindubooks.org/vinoba/gita/the_yoga_of_action/page1.htm*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The ideal man is he who, in the midst of the greatest silence and solitude, finds the intensest activity, and in the midst of the intensest activity finds the silence and solitude of the desert. He has learnt the secret of restraint, he has controlled himself. He goes through the streets of a big city with all its traffic, and his mind is as calm as if he were in a cave, where not a sound could reach him; and he is intensely working all the time. That is the ideal of Karma-yoga, and if you have attained to that you have really learnt the secret of work.

Swami Vivekananda

**—Swami Vivekananda**
*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*
(Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 18th repr. 1991), pp. 34-35


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## FOR REFLECTION

**1.** What do you consider your life calling, or vocation, as opposed to profession? In Karma-Yoga, the work we are called to do by inner and outer circumstance is our path to freedom. Are you ready to offer your life in service following your "inner law" (*sva-dharma*), without desiring personal benefit? When we examine our own innate talents—teaching, music, healing, etc.—as well as our practical responsibilities—parenting, marital duties, and community obligations—we can begin to sense what life is asking of us. Karma-Yoga begins right where we are. It involves engaging in relationships and work so that the truth of our deepest Self reveals itself. Like all Yoga practitioners, *karma-yogins* have a high ideal, but they need not step far afield to find grist for the mill. This involves skillfully engaging in whatever activities are demanded in the moment, including those that we normally do not find pleasant or fulfilling. If washing dishes is what the present moment demands, we should approach this simple task attentively and even happily. What are the chores that you dislike? Commit for one week to do them from the perspective of a *karma-yogin* or *karma-yoginî*.

**2.** When we meet people for the first time, often we introduce ourselves by saying what we do rather than who we really are. Our identity is deeply enmeshed in the activities we perform on a daily basis. This is largely so because we invest so much time and energy in our work. We seldom examine our various false identities. How do you see yourself?

**3.** On closer inspection, we can probably recognize that it is Nature's bounty that provides the resources for our daily sustenance. But our attachment to hard-earned money or the ideals of progress and success all too often make us forget that we are not ultimately in charge. Life is full of surprises, and karmic ripening can ruin our best plans. Of course, we need to have practical wisdom in conducting our daily business, but why should we indulge in so many worries? As one contemporary master once remarked, "It is useless to be concerned about things that have not happened yet and might never happen. Likewise it is pointless to worry over things that have already happened." Are you a worrier? What are the things that you are anxious about? Do you tend to procrastinate because you are worried about the outcome of your actions and decisions?

**4.** Why do you work? How much time do you give yourself for recreation and play? What about spiritual practice? Let us take a brief moment to examine these concepts. We work because we are compelled to work out of duty, to maintain ourselves, because


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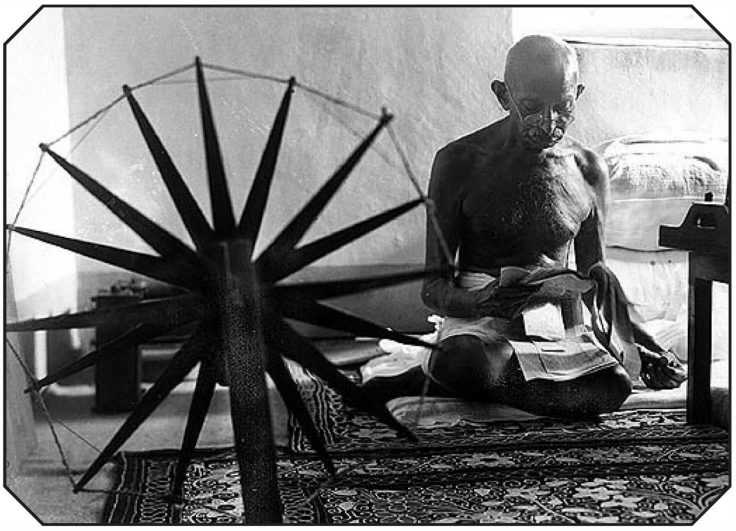

we enjoy working, etc., or in other words, we have certain relative desires that are fulfilled only through specific types of engagement, and because we are forced to act by the laws of nature.

Life itself can only be regarded as play if we are free, if our actions are not coerced by nature's inborn tendencies or our human impulses. The Hindu gods are said to engage in play (*lîlâ*) because they enjoy relative power or freedom. Forced action means action that is impelled by need or lack. Play denotes action born of fullness. It is something done for its own sake, beyond the force of rhyme and reason. Is work for you a form of play?

Spiritual practice is the conscious effort applied to gain a bit more freedom from the impulses of the lower mind or lower nature. Some will contend that all practice is ego-bound, but still, it is action that promotes the causes and conditions for one's essential freedom to be actualized. Yoga scriptures teach that we need a balance—work, play, and practice—or that we have to integrate the essence of each into a fully integrated approach to human life. Do you agree or disagree?

**5.** On a practical note, what forms of work give you a basic sense of fulfillment? Does your present work suit you and your spiritual ideals? What is its impact on the local community or the world at large? Have you considered the concepts of right livelihood or engaged spirituality?

**6.** Is your work passionate? Does it take away from the momentum of your *sâdhana?* Does your work help foster a sense of responsibility in you? Consider the psychological involvement you have with work, the way it effects you positively and negatively, as well as its influence on your physical health.

**7.** Do you agree with Gandhi that we should purchase goods made by the poor in one's own country rather than acquire them from abroad, even if foreign goods were superior in


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FOR REFLECTION ctd.

quality? Would you go further and say that because of the environmental crisis, especially pollution, we should limit our purchases to those goods that are grown or made near us to avoid the hidden environmental cost of transportation?

**8.** Should Karma-Yoga in general have a "green" orientation today? Should *all* our actions and activities bear the present sorry state of the environment in mind? Do you see a contradiction between Karma-Yoga and political or environmental activism? Is a spiritually based activism possible? working, etc., or in other words, we have certain relative desires that are fulfilled only through specific types of engagement, and because we are forced to act by the laws of nature.

Life itself can only be regarded as play if we are free, if our actions are not coerced by nature's inborn tendencies or our human impulses. The Hindu gods are said to engage in play (*lîlâ*) because they enjoy relative power or freedom. Forced action means action that is impelled by need or lack. Play denotes action born of fullness. It is something done for its own sake, beyond the force of rhyme and reason.

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## REMEMBER

As we noted before, we recommend that you write your responses to "For Reflection" and also to the Homework questions in your notebook. Many students have found this very helpful in assimilating yogic ideas and making them relevant to their daily life and spiritual practice.


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# QUESTIONNAIRE #6

Please SUBMIT this questionnaire to TYS: tyslearning@sasktel.net
Don't forget to include your full name, email address, date, and course title. Please refer to our instructions on p. 17.

**1. What is the *principal* purpose of Karma-Yoga?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) to reduce karma
(b) to lead up to Bhakti-Yoga
(c) to complement Raja-Yoga
(d) to help us live morally
(e) to lead to enlightenment/liberation
(f) to overcome inhibitions
(g) to renounce all actions
(h) to eliminate karma
(i) to promote virtue
(j) to harmonize social life

**2. Is activity an inbuilt or an acquired human trait?** *(Check one)*

(a) both
(b) inbuilt
(c) acquired

**3. What exactly is meant by *loka-samgraha*?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) self-transcendence
(b) altruism
(c) humanitarianism
(d) bringing the world together
(e) serving the welfare of the whole world
(f) honoring the unity of all beings

**4. Do the words *karma* and *karman* denote the same thing?** *(Check one)*

(a) yes, the former stands for the "action" of destiny, while the latter means "action" as such
(b) yes, the former is the nominative and accusative of the grammatical stem *karman*
(c) no, the former refers exclusively to destiny, while the latter refers to action causing destiny


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**5. Would it be correct to say that Karma-Yoga could involve civil disobedience?** *(Check one)*

(a) yes, if civil disobedience observes the moral virtue of nonharming
(b) yes, if civil disobedience gets the job done
(c) absolutely not

**6. Could a Karma-Yoga practitioner be an environmental activist?** *(Check one)*

(a) yes
(b) yes, but only if he or she does not violate the moral virtues of Yoga
(c) no, because environmental activism could be harmful to others (e.g., trying to save marine life harms the local fishing industry)

**7. Does the type of Karma-Yoga taught by Krishna entail higher wisdom (*buddhi*)?** *(Check one)*

(a) no, it is pure selfless service to others
(b) no, because the higher mind is tapped into only in the ecstatic state (*samâdhi*)
(c) yes, it could involve higher wisdom
(d) yes, higher wisdom is essential to Karma-Yoga

**8. According to Krishna, can Karma-Yoga help one overcome *all* karmic conditions and effects or only *some* of them?** *(Check one)*

(a) all karmic conditions and effects
(b) most of them
(c) only some of them
(d) only those leading to an undesirable human reincarnation

**9. Could a political leader responsible for an entire nation be a practitioner of Karma-Yoga?** *(Check one)*

(a) no, in principle
(b) yes, in principle; but not in practice
(c) yes, in principle and in practice

**10. How do YOU practice Karma-Yoga?** (200 words)


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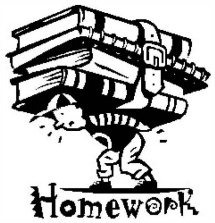
# LESSON 7

## I. Objectives

This lesson has the following three objectives:

- to help you understand the theory and practice of Mantra-Yoga, the yogic path of self-transcendence via potent sound
- to introduce you also to Laya-Yoga, the path of self-transcendence by means of working with the subtle energies
- to acquaint you with the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, an innovative modern teaching that is closely modeled on the integfrative Yoga of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the Tantric teachings

## II. Homework Assignments




- **Read** sections VII and VIII of Chapter 2 in *The Yoga Tradition* book (pp. 51–55).
- **Read** all materials of Lesson 7 in this Study Guide, including Additional Study Materials #30–34.
- **Ponder** the questions under "For Reflection" and jot down your significant thoughts.
- **Answer Questionnaire #7 and submit.**
- **Practical Assignment:** Every day for one week, practice conscious relaxation (*shava-âsana,* "dead pose") in the following manner. After scanning your body from top to toe for tension and releasing all identifiable stresses and strains in the body, feel the skin of your body. Next visualize yourself as a field of life energy that fills the whole body but also extends beyond it by a couple of inches. Thus, your skin is not a firm boundary of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who you are as an energy being. Now picture yourself as expanding a couple of inches beyond your skin. Try to *feel* this very strongly. Next envision yourself as expanding still more . . . 3 inches, 4 inches, 12 inches, 10 feet, and so on beyond the physical body. Extend yourself out into space as far as your imagination will allow, without you feeling in any way fearful. If you feel any fear whatsoever, limit this exercise to the first phase of feeling yourself as a bubble of energy rather than a hard, concrete physical body. As you move into your activity slowly and gradually, experience the *prâna*, or life energy, that moves through the body. If you are practicing *âsana,* consider your alignment and how it inhibits or sustains the free flow of *prâna* in the body. Ask who is doing the *âsanas*, the gardening, or walking. How does the mind relegate actions in the body?

## III. Introductory Remarks

Mantra-Yoga (as understood here) and Laya-Yoga are important branches of the vast yogic tradition of Tantra, or Tantrism, which is discussed further in Part V (Chapters 17 and 18) of *The Yoga Tradition* book and also in the Yoga Tradition course entitled ***From Medieval Hatha-Yoga and Tantra to Contemporary Yoga.***

While Mantra-Yoga, which is at the heart of Tantra, also has a Vedic variation (dating back to the *Rig-Veda*), Laya-Yoga is specifically Tantric. The present lesson, then, makes a bridge between Vedic recitation and the Tantric philosophy and practice of Mantra-Yoga. Thus, on the one hand, it covers an important and popular branch of Yoga, and on the other hand prepares the ground for the complex teachings of Tantra.

It seemed important to include Integral Yoga in my consideration of the "Wheel of Yoga." It is an authentic development of Yoga by a great sage and gifted philosopher. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga must be distinguished from the Integral Yoga originated by Swami Satchidananda (1914–2002), which also has an integrative orientation, with a major focus on Hatha-Yoga postures and other similar techniques. The latter, which is frequently listed as a "style" of contemporary Hatha-Yoga, is registered as a trademark in the United States.


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# VII. Mantra-Yoga: Sound as a Vehicle of Transcendence

**(YT, pp. 51-54)**

## Overview

Mantra-Yoga is probably as old as Yoga itself. It works with *sacred* sound, that is, sound that has a spiritual import and a transformative purpose. Such sound is called *mantra*. We constantly produce sounds with our bodies, especially our vocal chords, whose sounds are amplified by our bony skulls. We also produce a cacophony through technological gadgets, which are extensions of our bodies. Unfortunately, most of the sounds we generate are disharmonious, whereas *mantra* recitation is based on the ideal of harmony and seeks to reverse our ordinary situation.

George Harrison (died age 58 in 2001), one of the Beatles, was a Krishna devotee and made the *hare krishna mantra* famous during the counter culture of the 1960s and 1970s.

## Main Points

**1.** Mantra-Yoga is the path of self-transcendence utilizing *mantras*, or sacred sounds, which are effective means for focusing the mind. *Mantra* practice is common to all forms (Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina) and most branches of Yoga, notably Tantra (also known as Mantrayâna).

**2.** There are several texts that specifically expound Mantra-Yoga, especially the *Mantra-Mahodadhi,* which lists sixteen limbs for this yogic path.

**3.** A *mantra* is an instrument that liberates the mind from its conditioning by means of concentration. It is charged with psychospiritual power that transforms the human body/mind and allows us to transcend our limited self-sense.

**4.** For a *mantra* to have mantric force it must be empowered by a qualified *guru*. Some liken *mantras* to shells in which the living substance of mantric consciousness must be injected so that a practitioner can actually benefit from it. The practitioner must then enliven the *mantra* by reciting it a minimum number of times; typically the figure of 100,000 is mentioned.


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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #30**

# A World of Sound

by Jagadish Dasa

*Mantras* are letters, words, phrases, and also nonlinguistic sounds that have the purpose of mobilizing the hidden powers of the mind. Nonlinguistic sounds are, for instance, phonemes like *a, âh, hûm,* and also the subtle *nâda* sound. When we consider the structure of *mantras* and their great variety, we realize that we are dealing with a wide spectrum of uses of sound, which exceeds the interest of the various liberation teachings. From the beginning of the Vedic revelation (*shruti*), which is at the basis of the sacred knowledge of mantric power, we see that sound endowed chanters with spiritual power as well as material benefit. Mantra-Yoga is primarily concerned with sound as a tool for deconditioning the mind and transcending its inherent limitations.

The *mantra "om mane padme hûm"* is the most widely used *mantra* in Tibetan Buddhism

## The Vedas and Mantra

From Vedic times to the present, *mantras* have had a pervasive influence on all aspects of life in India. The Vedic hymns themselves are considered to be *mantras,* numinous sounds charged with unsurpassed significance. The Vedic revelation (*shruti*) is revealed Word (*shabda*)—a concept accepted by almost all schools of Indian philosophy. The Word, or scripture, is deemed the most reliable testimony (*pramâna*) about the transcendental Reality. The "heterodox" traditions of Buddhism and Jainism likewise place great faith in the revealed teachings (*dharma*). Apart from their transformative value on the spiritual path, *mantras* play a role in sacrificial rituals, rites of passage, healing (in Âyurveda), the acquisition of wealth, interpersonal relationships, and the removal of all kinds of obstacles.


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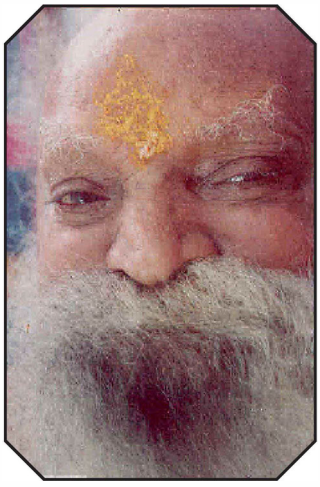
All orthodox schools of Hinduism, whether theistic or nontheistic, accept the eternality of the Vedic revelation. According to tradition, the *Vedas* are *apaurusheya*, that is, without human authorship, even though the hymns are traditionally associated with particular seers (*rishi*) or seer families.



"Mantric sound is the bridge between the Soul and God."

**—Shri Dhyanayogi Madhusudandasji**
(1887-1994)

## Mîmâmsâ and Sacred Sound

The Mîmâmsâ tradition (see SG, Lesson 8) is particularly concerned with the proper interpretation of the Vedic scriptures, especially the *Samhitâs* and *Brâhmanas*. The Vedic hymns are regarded taso as embodying eternal principles governing the universe and, at the moral level, create harmony (*rita*) between individual and society.

The *mîmâmsâkas*, or adherents of Mîmâmsâ, hold that the Vedic testimony (*shabda*) is the *only* reliable and acceptable means of knowledge (*pramâna*). The original Sound, or Word, is eternal. In other words, in this tradition, the revealed literature, accessed by the visionary insight of the sages, is absolute Reality itself. Not surprisingly, the *mîmâmsâkas* have always insisted on complete obedience to the Vedic injunctions and adherence to the Vedic rituals.

## Sound Burst (Sphota)

When we talk about words, we must also talk about meaning. What is the relationship between sounds and the meaning we give them? The Indian grammarians answered this question in the form of a teaching known as *sphota-vâda*. The famous grammarian Bhartrihari (c. 500 A.D.) composed the *Vâkya-Padîya*, a classic in Indian linguistic philosophy. In this text, he speaks of *shabda-brahman* (sonic Absolute) as an ultimate Real, which is of the essence of a unitary Word-Consciousness. *Sphota* (from *sphut,* meaning "to burst forth") is conceived as emerging out of this absolute Sound rather than out of a suprapersonal Being, or *purusha-uttama* (*purushottama*), as taught in the theistic schools. This doctrine seeks to take into account that, for instance, the word *yoga* is composed of the letters *y, o, g, a*, which in themselves have no meaning whatsoever. Therefore, the grammarians, argued, the letters conjointly also cannot yield the meaning of the word, in this case, "union." The meaning lies in the sound essence, which is the *sphota*. This *sphota* is eternal and self-existent and is permanently connected with the thing it signifies.

Our modern view is that the meaning of words is a matter of convention. Thus we could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arbitrarily assign the meanings of "aggregate" or "profit" to the word *yoga,* which are in fact two meanings given for this term in the Sanskrit dictionaries. In his book *Yoga Philosophy in Relation to Other Systems of Indian Thought,* Surendra Nath Dasgupta, one of the greatest contemporary historians of Indian thought, remarked nonchalantly, "This doctrine [of *sphota*] has indeed little or no philosophical importance" (p. 267). Thus, we may wonder why it was accepted by some of the commentators on Patanjali's *Yoga-Sûtra*. Be that as it may, the *sphota* concept is useful in discussing our notions of understanding and communication, if only to highlight the fact that our understanding is also only a model.

A radio telescope listens to the sound of the cosmos, whereas *yogins* prefer to listen to the inner sound (*nâda*). Yogic introspection also reveals the way in which the human mind constructs meaning out of sounds.

According to *varna-vâda*, as entertained by Mîmâmsâ, it is the letters (*varna*) that bear meaning, and the sound values of these letters have an eternal connection with their objects. This is why it is so important to pronounce the *mantras,* or words, correctly during the ritual. Incorrect or lax pronunciation undermines the success of a ritual. In contrast, *sphota-vâda* recognizes meaning or mental cognition as inherent in our consciousness and not inherent in a syllable or uttered sound. Thus, a word and its meaning are a whole in consciousness. A *mantra* is chanted keeping in mind its actual object, the *sphota*, which is cultivated or realized by a well-prepared consciousness.

Bhartrihari developed a spiritual practice called *shabda-pûrva-yoga* based on the discipline of grammar (*vyâkarana*). One of the most important aspects of the *sphota* doctrine is the idea of three levels of consciousness:

- *vaikhârî-bhûmi* — the level of conventional language where word and meaning are differentiated
- *madhyamâ-bhûmi* — the level of mental cognition where word and meaning are still slightly differentiated
- *pashyantî-bhûmi* — the level at which word and meaning are comprehended as a "visible" unity

The Tibetan Yoga adept Milarepa listening to the inner sound

The grammatical theory of the *sphota*, although rejected by most traditions, proved useful as a model for understanding the internalization of consciousness through sound—from audible speech to inaudible inner realizations. The above three-stage schema is fundamental to Mantra-Yoga.

Three significant terms that are relevant to our understanding of Mantra-Yoga are *nâda*, *bindu,* and *bîja*. These are explained in "The Sacred Syllable Om" (see Additional Study Materials #33). It is also helpful to know that in many Tantric and theistic Hindu texts, the phrase *nâda-brahman* for the most part replaces the Upanishadic term *shabda-brahman*.


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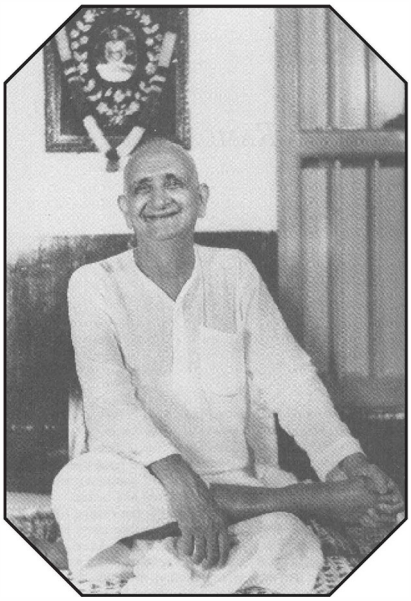
## Vedic Svâdhyâya or Recitation of Texts

As mentioned, the Vedic hymns are considered *mantras*. They were "seen" (i.e., realized) by seers (*rishi*), whose spiritual and highly poetic utterances communicate the power of their vision. Little wonder that later on their hymns were chanted in conjunction with ritual practices. With the aid of the Vedic *mantras,* the priests invoked (and still invoke) the deities, whose mediation is necessary for a successful sacrifice (*yajna*). The sacrificial ritual, in turn, has the purpose of connecting the priest with the cosmic order (*rita*). Thus mantric experience has a noetic quality; it conveys a heightened, intuitive knowledge—a revelatory mystical realization. The qualified ritualist is always both an illuminator and an illumined visionary, and *mantras*—as part of the Vedic liturgy, are conduits of immense creative or destructive force.



"Papa" Ramdas, who always had the divine name "Ram" (Rama) on his lips or in his thoughts

## The Sonic Absolute of the Upanishads

The Upanishadic sages, like the Vedic seers, were in tune with the revelatory power of the Word, which was often personified in Vedic times as Vâc, the Goddess of speech and creative ritual language. Scriptures like the ancient *Châ*ndogya-*Upanishad* introduced the concept of *shabda-brahman*—the Absolute as transcendental sound. The Upanishadic dictum "The Absolute is Speech" (*vâg vai brahma*) expresses this very idea. Through a number of linguistic devices, the Upanishadic teacher imparted liberating knowledge to competent candidates. Among these are the "great dicta" (*mahâ-vâkya*), which are terse and suggestive declarations about the ultimate Reality and our relationship to it. We will discuss them in later sections on Vedânta and the *Upanishads*. *Om* is unquestionably the central *mantra* of the *Upanishads*; it symbolizes the Absolute itself.

## Mantra in Classical Yoga, the Yoga-Upanishads, and Tantra

The *Yoga-Upanishads* reveal in more detail what is already evident in the *Yoga-Sûtra* of Patanjali: that *mantra* is an integral element of Yogic practice. This is reiterated in the texts of Hatha-Yoga, which come many centuries later.

In the *Yoga-Sûtra* (1.24), Patanjali refers to *îshvara,* a special Self or Lord, who is untouched by karma and conditional existence. He further describes (1.26) *îshvara* as a universal teacher through whose grace the *yogin* can attain *samâdhi* (2.45). Vyâsa, the primary commentator on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Sanskrit symbol for *om*

the *sûtras*, underscores the devotional element in Patanjali's *kriyâ-yoga*, and his observations are also relevant to the topic of Mantra-Yoga.

In aphorisms 1.28-29, Patanjali makes the statement that through concentration on the *pranava* (i.e., the sacred syllable *om*), the practitioner comes to understand its true meaning, and obstacles (*antarâya*) on the path are removed. Vyâsa comments that the *yogin* should reflect or meditate on the unity of *pranava* and *îshvara*, by which means his mind becomes one-pointed. He also mentions *svâdhyâya,* which can stand for self-study or the recitation of *mantras*. In aphorism 2.44, Patanjali states that through *svâdhyâya* the *yogin* comes in contact with the chosen deity (*istha-devatâ*). Some authorities interpret this to imply the recitation of *mantras*.

Goddess Sarasvatî, who embodies speech, especially inspired speech, and thus is a manifestation of the Vedic principle Vâc

The *Yoga-Upanishads* reveal further the deep connection between *mantra* and Yoga practice. The *Yoga-Shikhâ-Upanishad*, for instance, employs the three levels of sound first developed by Bhartrihari (i.e., *pashyantî*, *madhyamâ,* and *vaikhârî*) and includes a fourth level that transcends the others, namely *parâ*. This particular model recurs in other traditions. The *Amrita-Bindu-Upanishad* (see YT, pp. 34-36) and the *Amrita-Nâda-Upanishad* (see YT, pp. 313-316), among others, use meditation on *om* as a principal means to realization.

Mantra-Yoga is predominantly connected with the spiritual tradition of Tantra. According to Agehananda Bharati, *mantra* makes up c. 60 percent of the contents of *Tantras*. Hatha-Yoga, which is part of the Tantric tradition, continued to incorporate *mantra* theory and practice. The manuals of Hatha-Yoga also mention internal sounds that the *yogin* can perceive through persistent meditation practice. These often correspond to the sounds resonating in the purified subtle channels (*nâdî*). We will shed more light on these topics in connection with the teachings of Goraksha and the Nâthas (see YT, Chapters 17-18).

We can see how Tantric schools built upon or incorporated the *varna-vâda* or *sphota-vâda* doctrines discussed above. In the Tantric tradition, Vâc (the personification of divine Speech and revelation in the *Vedas*) becomes *shakti,* the divine feminine energy in the form of sound. The use of *mantra* in the Tantric *sâdhana* is discussed in YT, Chapter 17. For now we wish to briefly mention Abhinavagupta (10th A.D.), a Kashmiri nondual Shaiva master, who contributed deep metaphysical ideas about the nature of sound in relation to the Absolute. In his exposition of the Trika system of Shaivism, Abhinava Gupta takes up Bhartrihari's notion of four levels


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of sound-consciousness, with *parâ-vâc* being the primordial Word, which is the Awareness aspect of the ultimate Reality. The practitioner can awaken to this highest stage through dedicated *mantra-sâdhana*.

Abhinava Gupta with disciples

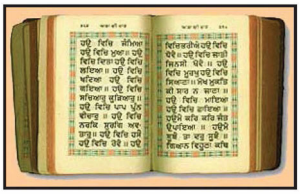
## Mantra in Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism

*Mantras* are widely employed also in non-Hindu forms of Yoga—i.e., Buddhism and Jainism—as well as in the Sikh tradition. Thus already in the Pali canon we find mention of protective *mantras* called *dhâranis*. The use of *mantras* increased with the rise of Mahâyâna at the beginning of the Christian (or Common) Era. The Mahâyâna approach to *mantra* is epitomized in the Jodo Shinshu, the devotional "Pure Land" School of Japanese Buddhism, which uses the *mantra "Om Namo Renge Kyo"* (YT, pp. 172-173) and relies on "other-power"—the mighty vow of Buddha Amida (Amitabha) to save those who chant this holy *mantra*. In other words, *mantras* are primarily used for invoking the help of the deities, which is also the Vedic and Hindu orientation.

Vajrayâna Buddhism emphasized *mantra* still more, which is why it came to be known as Mantrayâna. "The Buddhist Tantras," observed S. B. Dasgupta in *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* (p. 43), "abound with *mantras;* and these *mantras* are often nothing but some cardinal truths representing Mahayanic faith and philosophy. These *mantras* are to be chanted in the rites, ceremonies, meditations and also in connection with various Yogic practices." Frequently, however, the meaning of *mantras* is unimportant and what matters is the state of consciousness they effect in the practitioner. Some *mantras,* especially the seed syllables (*bîja-mantra*) like *âh* or *hûm*, have in fact no meaning at all, and yet they are extremely potent.

Buddhist prayer wheel

Sacred song (*kîrtana*) and recitation (*japa*) of the names of God are central to Sikh Yoga (see YT, pp. 333-338), a tradition that originated in the 16th century with Guru Nânak. Briefly, the *Guru-Grantha Sahib,* the sacred canon of the Sikhs, is considered the living manifestation of the *guru* and the authoritative testimony of God's mandates or revelations. The "root utterance" (*mûla-mantra*) at the heart of the canon is *ek onkar satnâm kartâ purush nirbhau virvair akâl mûrat, ajuni saibhang gurprasâdi,* meaning "One, the *om*-sound, Creator, Person, fearless, free from enmity, of timeless form, unborn, self-existent, the *guru's* grace." With this *mantra,* the Sikh practitioners keep before their mind's eye some of the excellent qualities of the Divine, the true *guru* of all.



*Guru-Grantha Sahib*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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #31**

# Mantra-Yoga: Sounding Out the Depth Within

by Georg Feuerstein

## The Vibratory Universe

According to Kashmiri Shaivism, a sophisticated Tantric school, the Ultimate Reality is both Consciousness/Awareness and Energy—Shiva and Shakti. This polar nature is captured in the idea that Reality itself is *parinishpandana*, or, in physicist David Boehm's terms, a "holo movement." Creation happens when this transcendental movement becomes specific, manifesting first space and time and then all the countless forms of the cosmos. Thus vibration (*spanda*) is the essence of cosmic existence. Put differently, the universe is an ocean of energy, which also is what contemporary physics tells us.

In the individual human body, this infinite energy is contained in the form of the serpent power (*kundalinî-shakti*). As the *Shâradâ-Tilaka-Tantra* (1.108) states, the *kundalinî* is the sonic Absolute (*shabda-brahman*). The sonic Absolute is the stepped-down version of the soundless Absolute (*ashabda-brahman*). The *kundalinî* is the power of Consciousness (*cit-shakti*), and as such is the superintelligent force sustaining the body and the mind through the mediating agency of the life force (*prâna*), which is directly related to and accessible through the breath.

## Mantric Science

$E = mc^2$

According to an esoteric explanation, the Sanskrit term *mantra* signifies "that which protects (*trâna*) the mind (*manas*)." Specifically, *mantra* is a sound (letter, syllable, word, or phrase) that is charged with transformative power, such as the letter *a,* the sacred syllable *om,* the word *hamsa*, or the


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phrase *om mani padme hûm*. Thus a *mantra* could be explained as a potentized sound by which specific effects in consciousness can be produced. Most high-minded practitioners are reluctant to use *mantras* for anything other than the greatest human goal (*purusha-artha,* written *purushârtha*), which is liberation. In Tantric rituals, *mantras* are used to purify the altar, one's seat, implements such as vessels and offering spoons, or the offerings themselves (e.g., flowers, water, food), or to invoke deities and protectors, and so on. Yet, the science of sacred sound (*mantra-shâstra*) has since ancient times been widely put to secular use as well. In this case, *mantras* assume the character of magical spells rather than sacred vibrations in the service of self-transformation and self-transcendence.

Many practitioners use a rosary (*mâlâ*) for *mantra* recitation

The serpent energy hidden in the body is associated with the Sanskrit alphabet constituted of fifty basic letters, or sound vibrations, which go into the making of *mantras*. In contrast to ordinary words, however, *mantras* most often do not have a particular meaning, and their potency is tapped into through frequent repetition, whether mentally, whispered, or aloud.

It is not commonly understood that for a sound to be a *mantra,* it must have been given in the context of initiation (*dîkshâ*), whether formally or informally. Only then does the *mantra* have truly transformative power. For a *mantra* to become "active" or "awakened," it must be recited at least 100,000 times. A *mantra* lacking in "consciousness" is just like any other sound. As the *Kula-Arnava-Tantra* (15.61-64) states:

> *Mantras* without consciousness are said to be mere letters. They yield no result even after a trillion recitations.
>
> The state that manifests promptly when the *mantra* is recited [with "consciousness"], that result is not [to be gained] from a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand, or ten million recitations.
>
> O Kuleshvarî, the knots at the heart and throat are pierced, all the limbs are invigorated, tears of joy, goosebumps, bodily ecstasy, and tremulous speech suddenly occur for sure . . .
>
> . . . when a *mantra* endowed with consciousness is uttered even once. Where such signs are seen, that [*mantra*] is said to be according to tradition.

*Mantras* of concentrated potency are known as "seed syllables" (*bîja*). *Om* is the original seed syllable, the source of all others. The *Mantra-Yoga-Samhitâ* (71) calls it the "best of all


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*mantras,*" adding that all other *mantras* receive their power from it. Thus *om* is prefixed or suffixed to numerous *mantras*, such as *om namah shivâya* ("*Om*. Obeisance to Shiva") or *om namo bhagavate* ("*Om*. Obeisance to the Lord [Krishna or Vishnu]").

Over many centuries, the Vedic and Tantric masters have conceived, or rather envisioned, numerous other primary power sounds besides *om*. These seed syllables (*bîja*), as they are called, can be used on their own or, more commonly, in conjunction with other power sounds forming a mantric phrase. According to the *Mantra-Yoga-Samhitâ* (71), there are eight primary *bîja-mantras*, which are helpful in all kinds of circumstances but which yield their deeper mystery only to the *yogin:*

1. *aim* (pronounced "I'm") — *guru-bîja* ("seed syllable of the teacher"), also called *vahni-jâyâ* ("Agni's wife")
2. *hrîm* — *shakti-bîja* ("seed syllable of Shakti"), also called *mâyâ-bîja*
3. *klîm* — *kâma-bîja* ("seed syllable of desire")
4. *krîm* — *yoga-bîja* ("seed syllable of union"), also called *kâli-bîja*
5. *shrîm* — *ramâ-bîja* ("seed syllable of delight"); Ramâ is another name for Lakshmî, the Goddess of Fortune; hence this seed syllable is also known as *lakshmî-bîja*
6. *trîm* — *teja-bîja* ("seed syllable of fire")
7. *strîm* — *shânti-bîja* ("seed syllable of peace")
8. *hlîm* — *rakshâ-bîja* ("seed syllable of protection

All this implies that only an adept in whom the *kundalinî* is awake can empower a sound—*any* sound—so that it is transmuted into a *mantra*. *Mantras* are the gift of masters of Yoga—great sages (*muni*) and seers (*rishi*)—and as such they should be treated with respect and with the understanding that they are indeed potent tools of self-transformation.

ॐ नमः शिवाय

*om namah shivâya*

ॐ नमो भागवते

*om namo bhâgavate*


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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #32**

# The Gâyatrî-Mantra

by Georg Feuerstein

If you were to ask a practicing Hindu which of all the *mantras* is the most sacred, he or she would undoubtedly reply: *om*. If you were to ask which composite *mantra* is the most precious or sacred, he or she would name the *gâyatrî-mantra*. Every day, at dawn, millions of Hindus recite this *mantra* as part of their morning ablutions. Specifically, *samdhyâ* (juncture) must be observed just prior to sunrise until the solar orb is fully visible above the horizon. The scriptures recommend that one should recite the *gâyatrî* as often as possible during this short period in order to attain a long and auspicious life as well as spiritual understanding. Typically, a brahmin holds water in his right hand and, bringing it close to his nose, blows on the water first through the right and then the left nostril, repeating the *gâyatrî* three times before pouring the water out.

The *mantra* gets its name from the poetic meter, which consists of three feet (*pâda*) of eight syllables each. The first four syllables are unfixed, while the last four have a prescribed cadence. The word *gâyatrî* is derived from the verbal root *gâ/gai* "to sing, chant," to which is added the suffix *trî*. The same root produces *gîtâ* ("sung," i.e., "song"), which is the past participle of *gâya* ("singing"). An esoteric interpretation is furnished in the *Brihad-Âranyaka-Upanishad* (5.14.4), which states that it acquired its name because it protects (*trâ*) one's wealth (*gaya*), presumably both material and spiritual. The *Chândogya-Upanishad* (3.12.1) declares:


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> The *gâyatrî* is speech, for speech sings (*gâyati*) and protects (*trâyati*) the whole world.

The true power of the *gâyatrî* is thought to lie in its fourth foot, which transcends grammar and is the blazing Sun itself (see *Brihad-Âranyaka-Upanishad* 5.14.3). The "Fourth" (*caturtha* or *turîya*) is an important metaphysical concept of the *Upanishads*: It stands for that part in us that exceeds waking, dreaming, and sleeping. It is the ever-wakeful transcendental Self (*âtman*) symbolized by the Sun. Hence the *Brihad-Âranyaka-Upanishad* (5.14.7) contains the verse:

> Salutation to your fourth, visible foot (*pâda*) beyond the sky.

The *gâyatrî-* or *sârasvatî-mantra* has been recited daily since Vedic times. It was first recorded in the *Rig-Veda* (3.62.10), the receptacle of India's most ancient wisdom that subsequently led to Hinduism. According to this Vedic hymnody, the *gâyatrî-mantra* runs:

*tat savitur varenyam*
*bhargo devasya dhîmahi*
*dhiyo yo nah pracodayât*

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि
धियो योनः प्रचोदयात्।

*Gâyatrî-mantra* as given in the *Rig-Veda*

To this verse are usually prefixed the *om* sound and what are called the three *vyâhritis* ("utterances") consisting of *bhûh, bhuvas, svah*, namely "Earth," "Mid-heaven," and "Heaven." In the *Brihad-Âranyaka-Upanishad* (5.5.3-4), these three are respectively correlated with the head, the arms, and the feet of the person. Curiously, the head is connected not with Heaven, as one might expect, but with Earth, while the feet are connected with Heaven. This hints at an archaic teaching about the human being springing from Heaven (involution) rather than from an earthly womb (evolution). The work of Yoga consists in finding our feet, or roots, in Heaven.

Also, there is a string of *mantras* often preceding the three *vyâhritis* that is known as *shiras* ("head"); it consists of *om âpo jyotî raso'mritam brahma* ("*om*, water, light, essence, immortality, the Absolute"). Thus the full text of the *gâyatrî* reads:

*om âpo jyotî raso'mritam brahma*
*om bhûr bhuvah svah* [or *suvah*]
*tat savitur varenyam*
*bhargo devasya dhîmahi*


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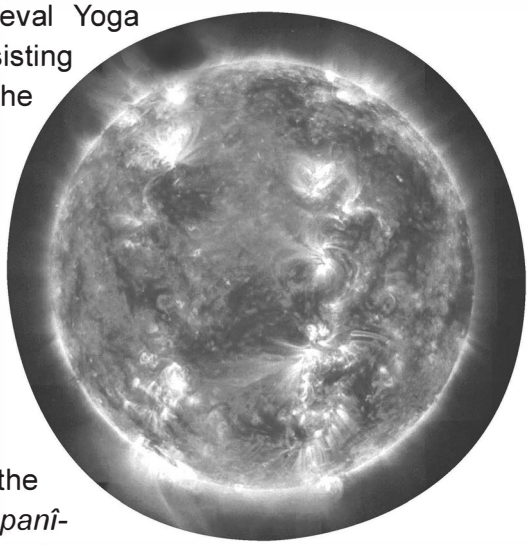
*dhiyo yo nah pracodayât*

*Om*. Water. Light. Essence. Immortality. The Absolute.
*Om*. Earth. Mid-heaven. Heaven.
Let us contemplate the most excellent splendor of God Savitri,
so that He may inspire our contemplations.

The *Amrita-Bindu-Upanishad*, an early medieval Yoga scripture, defines breath control (*prânâyâma*) as consisting of the threefold repetition of the *gâyatrî* along with the three *vyâhritis* and the *shiras* in a single breath.

The *gâyatrî-mantra* invokes the Solar Spirit, whose body is our Sun. The most ancient Yoga was a solar Yoga, and this tradition still lies at the heart of much of Hindu Yoga. Without the Sun, there would be no life on Earth. Thus the Hindus celebrate and worship the Solar Spirit as life-giver and also the principle that illuminates the mind.



The Sun, the huge radiant body of the Solar Being Savitri

The *gâyatrî* is explained in many places in the Sanskrit literature. For instance, the *Tripurâ-Tâpanî-Upanishad*, a fairly late work belonging to the Shâkta tradition, connects this *mantra* with the worship of the Goddess Tripurâ. She is celebrated as the great Power (Shakti) behind all manifestation.

In that scripture, we learn that the Sanskrit word **tat** ("that") refers to the eternal, unconditioned Absolute (*brahman*), the transcendental Reality out of which the world in all its many layers has evolved.

**Savitur** ("of Savitri"), the *Upanishad* further tells us, refers to the primal power of the Goddess Tripurâ, even though the Sanskrit word *Savitri* is a masculine word standing for the "Impeller," that is, the Sun or Solar Spirit. Savitri must not be confused with the Goddess Savitrî, who presides over all learning but also over the mighty river by the same name that once flowed from the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean. The name "Savitri" derives from the verbal root *su* meaning "to urge, instigate, impel," which is closely related to the second connotation of this root, namely "to extract, press." What Savitri extracts out of himself are two closely connected things: life-giving light and warmth.

**Varenyam** means "most excellent" or "most beautiful," designating that which has no superior. The word qualifies the word *bhargas*.

**Bhargo,** from *bhargas* ("splendor"), is said to be the transcendental aspect of Savitri, which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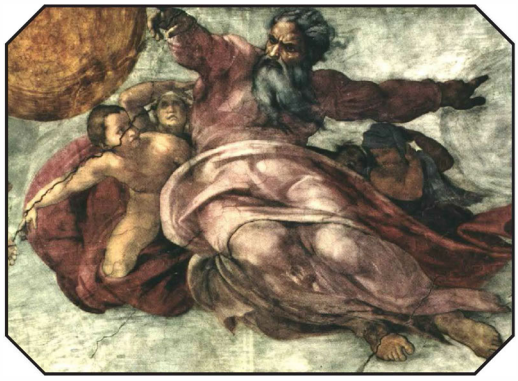
strikes us with awe—a splendor that cannot be seen with human eyes but that discloses itself only to the inner vision of the great Yoga adept.



Creation of Sun and Moon

**Devasya** means "of God," that is, "of Savitri."

**Dhîmahi** means "let us contemplate" and implies a heartfelt desire to focus the mind on the ultimate Reality through the medium of contemplation (*dhî*). In the *Rig-Veda*, the archaic term *dhî* stands for the later term *dhyâna*, which means "meditation/contemplation."

**Dhiyo,** from *dhiyas*, is the plural of *dhî*. Repeatedly the ancient sages fixed their minds on that One, and contemporary *yogins* still follow the same age-old practice. As their contemplations deepen, Savitri increasingly illuminates the mind.

**Yo,** from *yah*, is simply the relative pronoun "who," which here refers to God Savitri.

**Nah** means "us/our" and qualifies the contemplations of the sages.

**Pracodayât** is derived from the verb *pracodaya* (meaning "to cause to be inspired").

Without Savitri, the masters of yore felt their contemplations lacked inspiration. Only Savitri could inspire or illuminate their inner world, just as he illuminates the Earth through his radiant physical body (the visible solar orb).

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #33**

# The Sacred Syllable *Om*

by Georg Feuerstein

## The Meaning of Om

There is no question that *om* is the oldest *mantra*, or sound of numinous power, known to the sages of India. Its origin, however, is somewhat obscure. A century ago, the German scholar Max Müller, editor and translator of the *Rig-Veda*, had the idea that *om* might be a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Max Müller

contraction of the word *avam*, "a prehistoric pronominal stem, pointing to distant objects, while *ayam* pointed to nearer objects." He continued, "*Avam* may have become the affirmative particle *om,* just as the French *oui* arose from *hoc illud*." This obscure comment refers to the fact that *om,* in addition to its sacred significance, came to be used in the prosaic sense of "Yes, I agree." Müller's interesting philological speculation remains unsubstantiated, however.

More recently, a different approach was taken by Swami Sankarananda, who proposed that *om* derives from the Vedic word *soma*. Through the influence of the Persians, who did not pronounce the letter *s*, the word *soma* was changed to *homa* and subsequently was shortened to *om*. Like Müller's derivation, this is pure conjecture, but is nonetheless intriguing, as it brings out the traditionally accepted relationship between *soma* and *om*.

*Soma* is the sacred substance used in the principal Vedic sacrifice. It has been characterized as an intoxicant, and various scholars have, in my opinion, wrongly identified it as a concoction prepared from the fly agaric mushroom. In the Vedic literature, *soma* is always described as a creeper, which cannot be said to apply to a mushroom. Be that as it may, the real *soma* was not a plant or plant extract but a spiritual "elixir," or illuminating experience, as is evident from certain hymns of the *Rig-Veda* (e.g. 10.85.3). In this sense, we also encounter it in later Tantra, where *soma* stands for an inner process or esoteric phenomenon: the nectar of immortality said to ooze from the "Moon" at the *tâlu-cakra* ("palate wheel") in the head, dripping into the "Sun" stationed at the *nâbhi-cakra* ("navel wheel"). On the physical level, it corresponds to the saliva, which is known to have antiseptic, healing properties.

God Sûrya

Swami Sankarananda believed that, like *soma*, the sacred syllable *om* represents the Sun. This seems to be confirmed by the *Aitareya-Brâhmana* (*5.32*): *om ity asau yo'sau [sûryah] tapati,* "That which glows [i.e., the Sun] is *om*." The Sun was indeed central to the Vedic spirituality, and the Vedic sages looked upon the Sun not merely as a star that supplies our planet with the necessary light and warmth but as a multidimensional entity of which the visible stellar body is merely its outermost material shell.

The esteemed Swami's conjecture is worthy of deeper consideration. Most spiritual authorities, however, regard *om* as the vocalization of an actual "sound," or vibration, which pervades the entire universe and is audible to *yogins* in higher states of consciousness. In the Western hermetic tradition, this is known as "the music of the spheres." The Indian sages also speak of it as the *shabda-brahman* or "sonic Absolute," which, in the words of the *Châ*ndogya-Upanishad (2.23.3), is "all this (*idam sarvam*)." What this means is that *om* is the universe as a totality, not a conglomerate of individual parts, as we experience it in our ordinary


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state of consciousness. Thus *om* is the primordial sound that reveals itself to the inner ear of the adept who has controlled the mind and the senses. Vihari-Lala Mitra, in the introduction to his translation of the *Yoga-Vâsishtha,* equated the Greek word *on* ("being") with *om*. While this is linguistically unsustainable, philosophically the connection is valid, as *om* is the symbol of That Which Is, or *brahman*. He also made the link between *om* and *amen* to which the same strictures apply.

## The Early History of the Sacred Syllable

Significantly, the syllable *om* is not mentioned in the ancient *Rig-Veda,* which has recently been dated back to the third millennium B.C. and earlier still. However, a veiled reference to it may be present in one of the hymns (1.164.39), which speaks of the syllable (*akshara*) that exists in the supreme space in which all the deities reside. "What," asks the composer of this hymn, "can one who does not know this do with the chant?" He adds, "Only those who know it sit together here." That is, only initiates gather to delight in the mystery of the sacred syllable and the company of the deities.

> He who enters that syllable, the immortal, fearless sound, becomes immortal.
>
> **—Chândogya-Upanishad** (1.4.5)

The word *akshara* means literally "immutable" or "imperishable." This designation is most appropriate, since grammatically syllables are stable parts that make up words. In the case of the mantric *om,* this monosyllable came to represent the ultimate One, which is eternally unchanging (*akshara, acala*). The term *akshara* is used as a synonym for *om* in many scriptures, including the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (10.25), which has Krishna say, "Of utterances I am the single syllable."

In light of the early prominence given to *om* as the primordial seed sound, there is no good reason for assuming that the sagely composers of the Vedic hymns were ignorant of the sacred syllable *om*. Indeed, they were great masters of *mantra-yoga*, and the Vedic hymnodies are the astounding creation of their mantric competence. Possibly *om* was considered so sacred that it could not be mentioned outside the actual context of the Vedic sacrifices. In that case, it would have been passed on from teacher to student by word of mouth in strictest confidence. There would therefore have been no need to mention *om* in the sacred hymns. All initiates would have known it and also understood its sublime meaning. In any case, for countless generations any recitation of the Vedic hymns has begun with the syllable *om*. The *Atharva-Veda* (10.8.10) seems to hint at this with the following riddle:


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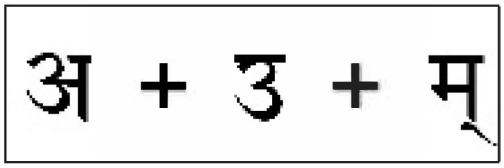
What is joined to the front and to the back and is joined all around and everywhere, and by which the sacrifice proceeds? That praise (*ric*) I ask of you.




The syllable *om* is often appended to longer mantric utterances, both introducing and concluding them, and this practice is very old indeed.

As time went by, the ban on uttering the sacred syllable or even writing it down outside the sacrificial rituals was relaxed. Thus the sacred syllable is first mentioned by name in the opening hymn of the *Shukla-Yajur-Veda* (1.1), the "white" recension of the Vedic hymnody dealing strictly with the performance of the sacrifices (*yajus*). This could be a later addition, however, for the *Taittirîya-Samhitâ* (5.2.8), which is appended to the *Yajur-Veda*, still cryptically speaks of the "divine sign" (*deva-lakshana*) that is written threefold (*try-alikhita*). Some scholars have seen this as a reference to the three constituent parts of the syllable *om*, as written in Sanskrit: *a* + *u* + *m*. The three constituents of *om* are referred to, for instance, in the *Prashna-Upanishad* (V.5). The symbolic elaboration of this is found in the *Mândûkya-Upanishad,* as we will see later.

That the sacred syllable was written down early on is clear from the fact that it had to be traced in sand or water during certain of the ancient rituals. This is also a significant piece of evidence in favor of writing at least in the late Vedic era, which is generally denied by historians. However, today we appreciate that ancient Indian history needs to be completely rewritten. The long-held belief that the Vedic people invaded India between 1200 and 1500 B.C. has been shown to be unfounded. In fact, all the evidence points to the identity between the Vedic people and the builders of the great cities along the banks of the Indus river. Since inscribed artifacts have been found in the Indus cities, the question of whether or not the Vedic people knew writing can be conclusively answered in the affirmative.

It is true, though, that the Vedic hymnodies were in all probability never written down until comparatively recently, yet the *brahmins* had devised an ingenious system of memorization to guarantee that the *Vedas* were preserved with utmost fidelity. It appears that they have been successful in this, thanks to the prodigious memories of the Vedic specialists. Other cultures, which held their sacred tradition in a similar high regard, sought to preserve it by memorization rather than writing it down on impermanent materials that, moreover, might fall into the wrong hands. Nowhere, however, has the art of memorization reached the sophistication that it did in India.

Over many generations, *om* was not uttered outside the sacred context of ritual worship. It was a secret sound communicated by word of mouth from teacher to disciple, that is, originally from father to son. Even the early *Upanishads* (which have recently been dated back to the second millennium B.C.) often still refer to it only indirectly as the *udgîtha* ("up sound") and the *pranava*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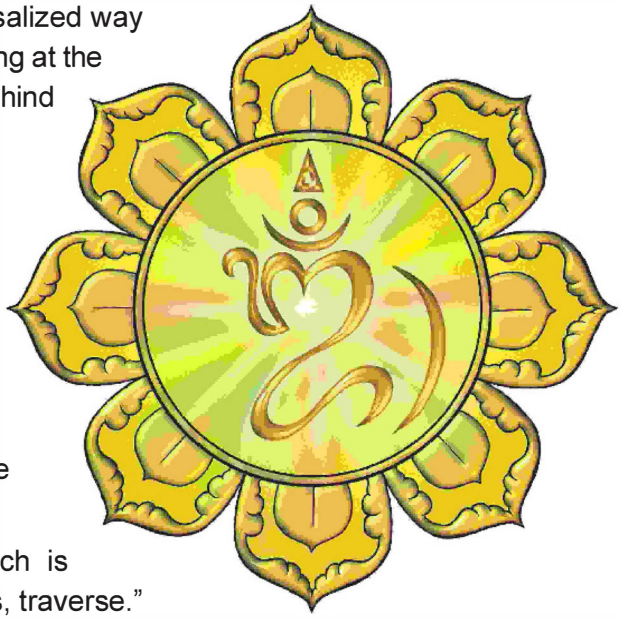
("pronouncing"). The former word hints at the nasalized way in which *om* is sounded out, with the sound vibrating at the psychoenergetic center located between and behind the eyebrows (i.e., the *âjnâ-cakra*).



The term *pranava* is derived from the prefix *pra* (etymologically related to the Latin "pro") and the stem *nava* (derived from the verbal root *nu* meaning "to call out" and "to exult"). It is used, for instance, in the *Yoga-Sûtra* (1.27), where it is called the symbol (*vâcaka*) of the Lord (*îshvara*). Patanjali further states (in 1.28) that in order to realize the mystery of the Lord, the *om* sound should be recited *and* contemplated.

Another, later term for *om* is *târa,* which is derived from the verbal root *trî,* meaning "to cross, traverse." This is a reference to the liberating function of the *om* sound, which safely transports the *yogin* across the ocean of existence (*bhava-sâra*) to the "other shore." Through recitation, which is mindful repetition of the *om* sound, the *yogin* can transcend the mind itself and thus is freed from the illusion of being an insular being separate from everything else. The *om* sound is truly liberating because it expands the reciter beyond the physical boundary of the skin and beyond the metaphorical boundary of preconceptions, thus restoring the recognition of the universal Self as his or her true identity.

In the earliest *Upanishads*, such as the *Brihad-Âranyaka, Châ*ndogya, and *Taittirîya*, the sacred syllable *om* is mentioned many times by name, both as *om* (or *aum*) and *om-kâra* ("*om* making," meaning the "letter *om*"). However, *udgîtha* is more common. It is the *Châ*ndogya that first clearly spells out the equation between the words *udgîtha* and *pranava* (a term not found in the *Brihad-Âranyaka*). Perhaps these two terms came in vogue because for unknown reasons *om* had, by that time, spread beyond the sacred domain and begun to be used in the sense of "Yes, I agree." The first record of this usage is in the *Brihad-Âranyaka-Upanishad* (3.9.1) itself, where *om* is employed seven times in this manner. Indeed, the *Châ*ndogya-Upanishad (1.1.8) clearly states: "That syllable is a syllable of assent, for whenever we assent to anything we say *aum* [= *om*]." Max Müller commented on this as follows:

> If, then, *om* meant originally *that* and *yes,* we can understand that, like *Amen*, it may have assumed a more general meaning, something like *tat sat*, and that it may have been used as representing all that human language can express.

The *Châ*ndogya-Upanishad (1.1.9) also has this relevant passage:

> By this the threefold knowledge proceeds. To honor this syllable, *aum* is recited,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*aum* is exclaimed, *aum* is chanted, with its greatness and essence.

*Om* in Tibetan script

Interestingly, in his commentary on this *Upanishad*, Shankara takes this passage to refer to the *soma* sacrifice, which again affirms the connection between *om* and *soma* mentioned above. He states that the *soma* ritual is performed to celebrate, or honor, the sacred syllable, which is the symbol of the Divine. This sacrifice, he further explains, maintains the Sun from which proceeds all life and nourishment by means of warmth and rain.

The *Châ*ndogya-Upanishad (1.9.4) also quotes Atidhanvan Shaunaka, the teacher of Udara Shândilya, as saying, "So long as your descendants will know this *udgîtha*, their life in this world will be the highest and best." This expresses the idea that the sacred syllable is a blessing for those who utter it. For this reason it is worthy of being held in the highest esteem, as this and other scriptures emphasize.

According to the concluding verses of the *Brihat-Samnyâsa-Upanishad*—a text of the medieval period—12,000 recitations of *om* remove all sins, while 12,000 recitations daily for a period of one year bring realization of the Absolute (*brahman*). What greater blessing can there be than this?

## From Om to Aum

At least two millennia after the sacred syllable *om* was discovered by the Vedic seers (*rishis*), the anonymous sage who composed the brief *Mândûkya-Upanishad* utilized this age-old *mantra* to expound the metaphysics of Advaita Vedânta. Thus he explained the three constituent parts (*mâtrâ*) of the syllable—namely *a* + *u* + *m*—as symbolizing past, present, and future, as well as waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. He also spoke of a fourth part that transcends the other three and concluded his esoteric observations with the statement that *om* is the Self (*âtman*), saying, "He who knows this enters the Self with the self—indeed, he who knows this!"

The importance of the *Mândûkya-Upanishad* can be gauged from the fact that the venerable sage Gaudapâda wrote his celebrated commentary entitled *Mândûkya-Kârikâ* on it, which was subsequently commented on at length by Shankara, the great preceptor of the school of nondualism (*advaita*). Gaudapâda was the teacher of Govindapâda, Shankara's *guru*.

Another scripture, given exclusively to explaining the sacred syllable *om* is the *Atharva-Shikhâ-Upanishad*. This scripture begins with the question: What should one meditate on? The answer is: the syllable *om,* which symbolizes the supreme Absolute (*brahman*). The text speaks of four constituent parts of this *mantra,* each having its own symbolic correlations as follows:

1. the sound *a* — earth — *ric* (hymn of praise) — *Rig-Veda* — Brahman — Vasus (a class of eight deities) — *gâyatrî* meter — *gârhapatya* fire — red — dedicated to Brahman


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2. the sound *u* — atmosphere — *yajus* (sacrificial formula) — *Yajur-Veda* — Vishnu — Rudras (deities governing the region between earth and heaven) — *trishtubh* meter — *dakshina* fire — bright — dedicated to Rudra

3. the sound *m* — heaven — *sâman* (sacred chants) — *Sâma-Veda* — Vishnu — Âdityas (deities connected with the Goddess Aditi, symbolizing primordial infinity) — *jagatî* meter — *âhavanîya* fire — black — dedicated to Vishnu

4. "half-part" (*ardha-mâtra*) — Atharvan songs — *Atharva-Veda* — fire of universal destruction — Maruts (deities of the mid-region who are especially associated with the wind) — Virât — lightning-like and multicolored — dedicated to Purusha

Shankara greeting his teacher Govinda

The most important part is the nasalized "half-part" sound *m*, which brings its own illumination and causes the life force (*prâna*) in the body to rush upward into the head. This *Upanishad* further states that the *om* sound is called *om-kâra* because it sends the currents of the life force upward (*ûrdhvam utkrâmayati*) and that it is called *pranava* because it makes all the life currents bow down (*pranâmayati*) before it. The text concludes by stating that the *om* sound is Shiva.

Interestingly, in Tantra-Yoga, the serpent power *(kundalinî-shakti*) resting in the psychoenergetic center at the base of the spine, is said to be coiled up three and a half times. Very likely, this captures the same idea as in the notion of the three and a half units of the *om* sound. The *Tantras* would presumably modify the *Upanishad's* final claim to replace Shiva with Shakti, which in the form of the *kundalinî* rises upward and while doing so assimilates the life currents. In fact, the ascent of the serpent power is accompanied by manifestations of ever more subtle sound.

According to the *Amrita-Bindu-Upanishad* (4), only the silent part of the sound *m* leads to the soundless, invisible Abode, the ultimate Reality. This scripture explains breath control (*prânâyâma*), a very important aspect of yogic discipline, as the recitation of the *gâyatrî-mantra: tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhîmahi dhiyo yo nah pracodayât*. This *mantra* is to be recited together with the *pranava* and the *vyâhritis* ("formulaic utterances," notably the words *bhûh bhuvah svah*, standing for "earth," "mid-region," and "heaven" respectively). This sacred *mantra* should be recited three times in a single breath.

The *Amrita-Nâda-Upanishad* (2ff) recommends that one should mount the "chariot of the *om* sound," make Vishnu one's charioteer, and steer steadily toward the ultimate Reality. As one


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approaches the supreme Self, one should abandon the chariot and enter the splendor of the Self by means of the unsounded letter *m*. This is the silent, subtle part of *om*.

Five-faced Shiva on a *yoni* base representing Shakti

This *Upanishad* prescribes breath control, especially retention of the breath, as a means of controlling the senses and focusing the mind upon the inner world. It defines Yoga as the state of restraint over a period of twelve units or measures (*mâtrâ*), that is, twelve recitations of *om*. It promises the dawning of wisdom within three months of diligent and continuous practice, an inner vision of the deities within four months, and final liberation within a mere six months. Of course, one must be able to sustain unwavering concentration for that span of time in order to succeed. For most people, this is an impossibility. For, as one Vedic seer-bard (*rishi*) complained in the *Rig-Veda* (10.33.2), "My mind flutters here and there like a bird."

According to the *Dhyâna-Bindu-Upanishad* (15), the *pranava* is the bow, oneself is the arrow, and the Absolute is the target. This metaphor is first found in the *Mundaka-Upanishad* (2.2.3-4). It also calls the *pranava* imperishable and states that its "fine end" cannot be expressed. Another favorite metaphor, also recapitulated in the *Dhyâna-Bindu-Upanishad* (22), is that of oneself as the lower churning stick (*arani*) and the *om* sound as the upper churning stick. By practicing it, one can restrain one's breath and dissolve the subtle sound (*nâda*).

Through constant cultivation of the subtle inner sound, declares the *Nâda-Bindu-Upanishad* (49), the karmic imprints (*vâsanâ*) left by our past volitional activity are eradicated. This leads to the merging of mind and life force. When the mind and the life force are motionless, the person abides as the subtle sound known as *brahma-târa-antara-nâda,* which can be translated as the "innermost sound that is the brahmic liberator (*târa*)."

A fascinating account of the sacred syllable is given in the *Nârada-Parivrâjaka-Upanishad* (8.1ff.), a medieval scripture. Here *om* is said to be threefold: the destructive *om*, the creative *om*, and the internal-and-external *om* (comprising the two former types). Another threefold division is: the brahmic *om*, the internal *om,* and the practical *om*. Then the text mentions two more sets: the external *om*, the *om* of the seers (*rishi*), and the *virât om* (consisting of the former two), as well as the destructive *om*, the Brahma *om*, and the *om* of the half-measure (*ardha-mâtrâ*).

This *Upanishad* goes on to explain these various forms of *om* as follows: The internal *om* is the single syllable *om*, which has eight parts—*a, u, m, ardha-mâtrâ*, *nâda*, *bindu, kalâ,* and *shakti*. The phoneme *a* is said to consist of 10,000 parts, the phoneme *u* of 1,000 parts, the phoneme *m* of 100 parts, and the *ardha-mâtrâ* of an infinite number of parts. The creative *om* is described as having qualities and the destructive *om* as having none. The *virât om* is said to consist of


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sixteen units (morae). In addition to the above-mentioned eight parts (which are explained below), the sacred syllable also has *kalâ-atîta, shânti, shânti-atita* (written *shântyatîta*), *unmanî, mana-unmanî* (written *manomanî*), *purî, madhyamâ, pashyantî,* and *parâ*. This text also refers to 64 and 128 parts of the sacred syllable, but it makes the point that ultimately its designated object—the Absolute—is singular.

Bindu, the source point

## The Sacred Syllable Om in the Tantras

The above Upanishadic ideas lead to the speculations about *om* in the Tantric literature where concepts like *nâda*, *bindu, kalâ, shakti,* etc., abound. The *Shâradâ-Tilaka-Tantra* (1.108) describes the cosmogonic process in terms of the production of sound as follows: From the supreme Shakti—pure Consciousness combined with the factor of lucidity (*sattva*)—comes the most subtle sound (*dhvani*), which is marked by a preeminence of the factors of lucidity and dynamism (*rajas*). Out of the *dhvani* develops the subtle sound (*nâda*), characterized by a mixture of the factors of lucidity, dynamism, and inertia (*tamas*). This subtle sound, in turn, gives rise to the energy of restriction (*nirodhikâ*), which has an excess of the factor of inertia. This ontic principle emanates the "half-moon" (*ardha-indu*, written *ardhendu*), which at this lower level again shows a predominance of the factor of lucidity. Out of it comes the vibratory source point (*bindu*), the immediate source of all letters and words. These form *mantras*, which are thus manifestations or vehicles of Shakti.

This scripture (1.8) further explains that the *bindu* is itself composed of three parts, viz., *nâda, bindu,* and *bîja* ("seed"). The first part has a predominance of Consciousness (i.e., Shiva), the second a preponderance of Energy (i.e., Shakti), and the third an equal presence of Consciousness and Energy. Such esoteric accounts of the evolution of sound remain relatively unintelligible outside of Tantric practice; however, they become increasingly meaningful as the practitioner makes progress on the path of *mantra-vidyâ* or "mantric science."

The primordial sound is uncaused. In the language of Kashmiri Tantrism, it is pure vibration (*spanda*). According to the *Kirana-Tantra* (copied in 924 A.D.), *om* resides in the throat of Shiva and is the Divine itself. This scripture also describes it as the root of all *mantras,* stating that upon articulation it becomes *vâc* ("speech"), corresponding to the Greek concept of *logos*.

As we get higher up the ladder of ontic unfoldment, we encounter ever more subtle energies. Thus the *mâtrikâs* are the subtle alphabetic counterpart to their corresponding audible sounds; the *bindu* is subtler than the *mâtrikâs*, and the *nâda* is still more subtle. As the *Yoga-Shikhâ-Upanishad* (2.21) states, "There is no *mantra* higher than the *nâda*." In old graphic representations of the *om-kâra,* the *nâda* symbol is drawn or painted as an inverted crescent *above* the *bindu,* which suggests that the *nâda* is prior to the *bindu*. Later the crescent placed *below* the *bindu* emphasized that the *nâda* contains the *bindu*. Both graphic representations make the same point, however.


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The *nâda* itself has various levels of subtle manifestation. According to the *Hamsa-Upanishad* (16) it manifests in ten different ways. First there is the sound *cini*, then *cini-cini*. The third sounds like a bell, the fourth like the blast of a conch, whereas the fifth has the quality of a harp sound. The sixth through the ninth respectively resemble the sounds of cymbals, flute, kettle drum, and tabor. Only the tenth type, which is like a thunder clap, should be cultivated. Various physiological symptoms are said to accompany these sounds. Thus when the fourth sound is heard (in the right ear), one's head begins to shake, while the fifth sound causes the subtle center at the root of the palate to stream with the lunar ambrosia, and so on. The final sound alone is accompanied by identification with the supreme Absolute (*para-brahman*).

Some *Tantras* differentiate between *mahâ-nâda* (also called *nâda-anta*) and *nirodhinî*, which is transmuted into *bindu*. This is also called *tri-bindu* because it is subdivided into *nâda, bindu,* and *bîja*. In this case, the *nâda* is correlated with *shiva,* the *bindu* with *shakti*, and the *bîja* with both Shiva and Shakti. The ultimate Reality itself can be viewed as a point origin, and as such is sometimes referred to as *para-bindu* or transcendental germinal point.

*Om* is the ultimate *bîja-mantra*. The idea of *om* being the root of other *mantras* may actually have given rise to whole idea of *bîja-mantras,* which are root sounds associated with particular deities. They are special high-potency sounds or vibrations giving direct access to the spiritual realities for which they stand. The *Mantra-Yoga-Samhitâ* (71) calls *om* the "best of all *mantras,*" adding that all other *mantras* receive their power from it. Thus *om* is prefixed or suffixed to numerous *mantras*:

*Om namah shivâya*. "*Om*. Obeisance to Shiva."
*Om namo bhagavate*. "*Om*. Obeisance to the Lord [Krishna or Vishnu]."
*Om namo ganeshâya*. "*Om*. Obeisance to [the elephant-headed] Ganesha."
*Om namo nârâyanâya*. "*Om*. Obeisance to Nârâyana [Vishnu]."
*Om shânte prashânte sarva-krodha-upashamani svâhâ*. "*Om*. At peace! Pacifying! All anger be subdued! Hail!" (Note pronunciation: *sarva-krodhopashamani*)
*Om sac-cid-ekam brahma*. "*Om*. The singular Being-Consciousness, the Absolute."

## Vâc

I, the queen of all, first of those that mankind worship, worthy of all praise, I proclaim aloud my wisdom. Hearken unto me, my word is true: Unto God and Man I bring blessing, pouring forth my wealth, making wise the man I cherish. Through me each one lives, each one breathes and sees and hearkens. All unite in me, I alone sustain creation, compassing the earth I reach t'ward heav'n. In the water's depth I have my dwelling, On the summit of the universe I bring forth the Father. Beyond the earth and sky I reign in my mystic grandeur.

***—Rig-Veda***
Translated by Gustav Holst (1874-1934)


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The *Mahânirvâna-Tantra* (3.13) calls the last-mentioned *brahma-mantra* the most excellent of all *mantras,* which promptly bestows not only liberation but also virtue, wealth, and pleasure. The *para-bindu* mentioned above is said to have a masculine and a feminine side, which are respectively called *ham* and *sa,* thus yielding the sound or word *hamsa*, meaning "swan," but signifying the sound of the breath and indeed the breath itself as it enters and leaves the body. This natural motion of breathing, which is calculated to occur 21,600 times every day, is called spontaneous recitation (*sahaja-japa*) or unrecited recitation (*ajapa-japa*).

All *bîja-mantras* consist of single syllables and end in the nasalized *anusvâra* sound—*m.*

The *hamsa* also stands for the psyche (*jîva*), which lives through the breath. This spontaneous *mantra* is understood as *so'ham* or "I am he," that is, "I am Shiva, the ultimate Reality." But ignorance prevents us from realizing this; hence the need for spiritual practice. The *Yoga-Bîja* (156), a comparatively late Hatha-Yoga text, states that when the *prâna* enters the central channel, the natural *mantra* reverses itself from *hamsa* to *so'ham*. Experientially, however, this is not different from the primordial *om,* the root *mantra* that reverberates through the entire cosmos. The *Mantra-Yoga-Samhitâ* (73) has this stanza:

> When people hear the *pranava* they hear the Absolute itself.
> When they utter the *pranava* they go to the abode of the Absolute.
> He who perceives the *pranava* sees the state of the Absolute.
> He who always has the *pranava* in his mind has the form of the Absolute.

*so'ham* *hamsah*

## Conclusion

This brief discourse on the history and nature of the sacred syllable *om* is meant to give the reader a better appreciation of the metaphysical complexities surrounding this age-old *mantra* and of some of the profound spiritual practices associated with it. It would be possible to write several volumes on this subject, just as it would be possible to provide an overview of India's spiritual traditions based solely on the theory and practice of the *om* sound. What has been presented here is but a minute fraction of the teachings about *om* developed over a span of five millennia.

The Yoga tradition is very rich and immensely sophisticated; yet its various schools and their respective paths are at core very simple, and in their simplicity they have many features in common. Above all, they lead to the same goal, which is the transcendence of the ego-personality, however this may be conceived and expressed in words. As the *Rig-Veda* (1.164.46) declared


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five millennia or more ago, "There is a single Truth, but the wise call it by different names."

## Notes

1. M. Müller, *Three Lectures on the Vedânta Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894), p.

2. Ibid. 116.

3. See Swami Sankarananda, *The Rigvedic Culture of the Pre-Historic Indus* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1942), p. 75.

4. See V.-L. Mitra, *The Yoga-Vasishtha-Maharamayana* (Calcutta: Bonnerjee and Co., 1891), vol. 1., p. 39. Apparently, Mitra got this idea from Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of Brahma Samaj.

5. Ibid., p. 46. In linking *om* with *amen*, Mitra took his cue from the great Sanskrit scholar Rajendra Lala Mitra.

6. See, e.g., G. Feuerstein, S. Kak, and D. Frawley, *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization: New Light on Ancient India* (Wheaton, Ill.: Quest Books, 1996).

7. M. Müller, op. cit., p. 116.

You are the architect of your own fate and fortune. You are the master of your own destiny. You can do and undo things. You can attain Brahmanood by right thinking, right feeling and right acting. You can break old morbid habits by the power of WILL. You can destroy wrong Samskaras [subconscious patterns], unholy desires, wrong imaginations. You can build new habits. You can change your nature. You can build up beautiful character. You can move the whole world by your spiritual force. You can elevate others also to the status of divinity. You can control the force of nature. You can command the elements.

Rely on your own Self. Do not be credulous. Believe not in any dogmas. Hear the inner voice of the Soul or promptings of the purse conscience. Be not a slave. Do not sell your liberty. Thou art the immortal Soul.

—Swami Sivananda, *Sadhana* (Rishikesh: Divine Life Society Publications, 2d ed. 1967), p. 171


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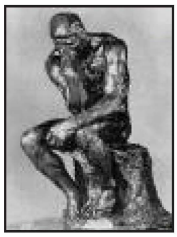

**1.** What is the first sound you hear when you wake in the morning? Is it a car, a child, the neighbor's dog, the radio? What effect does it have on your consciousness? For your first exercise try to find a quiet and safe place in nature and sit and listen. If you can remain in a supine position without falling asleep this would be helpful. *Shava-âsana* is preferable. Remain open to the gentle sounds of Nature and really allow your heart to open. Do not try to block out sensory impressions but remain receptive, though your eyes may remain closed. See the effect of this more stable environment and examine what feelings or thoughts arise. If there is a flowing body of water such as a stream or waterfall, sit in a safe spot near its banks and allow the continuous sound of the water to be an object of meditation. You need not focus on it directly, but use it as a background current to stabilize the breath. Do not force or constrict the breath or try to restrain the mind too intensely. Just allow a deep space to open up from within. Perhaps you will have your own realizations of sound, nature, the mind, or the Self.

**2.** What are the first words you speak in the morning? Are they a greeting to a loved one, a prayer, an affirmation? How long do you keep silence in the morning?

**3.** Do you consciously choose to speak kind words? What are the effects of speaking with loving-kindness, and how do kind or harsh words affect your own state of mind?

**4.** What role does music play in your life? What kind of music do you listen to, if at all? What are the effects of this music on your consciousness? How does music relate to your spiritual path overall?

**5.** Words and sounds can trigger states of mind and release memories. The connection between a sound or word and the object that it is meant to signify is a fruitful area of investigation. Is there any piece of music or a sound that fosters in you peacefulness or silence? What music tends to trigger in you romantic, wistful, or unpleasant memories?

**6.** What is your experience of silence? Have you ever gone on a silent retreat? Try a morning practice of *mauna* or silence and discover how this transforms the mind.

**7.** You may wish to experiment with the chanting of *mantras*. Choose a single-syllable or short *mantra* or prayer such as *om*. You can choose an object of meditation from any


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tradition. Begin by reflecting on the meaning of your prayer or *mantra*. Start recitation and concentrate first on the sound vibration. After a few seconds or minutes, begin to focus on both the sound and its meaning. Continue for up to five or ten minutes. End the session with a few deep, gentle breaths. Reflect on your experience.

**8.** Do you feel that certain sounds are more spiritual than others or perhaps have a particularly beneficial effect on the mind or body? What are your views on the relationship between sound and healing?

**9.** What is your understanding of the relationship between a word and its meaning? What about between a word or *mantras* and an Ultimate Reality?

**10.** If you are an *âsana* practitioner, you may benefit from seeing how you consciously or unconsciously use sound as a meditative support. Consider whether you tend to listen to the sound of your breath as you engage in a pose or listen to music.

**11.** If you are a practitioner of yogic rituals, you may be familiar with using different ritual implements such as bells, drums, etc. Consider both the symbolism of different implements as well as how you have become accustomed to the sounds of these ritual objects. Do they remain awkward tools or cues into a contemplative mode? Consider the benefits or efficacy of this whole-body, sensual engagement.

## REMEMBER

As we noted in the Practical Guidelines, we recommend that you write your responses to "For Reflection" and also to the Homework questions in your notebook. Many students have found this very helpful in assimilating yogic ideas and making them relevant to their daily life and spiritual practice.


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# VIII. Laya-Yoga: Dissolving the Universe
## (YT, pp. 54-55)

## Main Points

**1.** Laya-Yoga, a form of Tantric Yoga, is a process of meditative absorption whereby the *yogin* or *yoginî* progressively dissolves the structures of the limited ego-self. This delicate process involves the awakening and careful manipulation of the "serpent power" ((*kundalinî-shakti*), which is the ultimate Consciousness-Energy brought down to the level of the individual human being.

Shyam Sundar Goswami

**2.** In Laya-Yoga, *asamprajnâta-samâdhi*, or formless ecstasy, is achieved through the psychophysical practices of Hatha-Yoga, especially the arousal and manipulation of the "serpent power." The arsenal of the *laya-yogin* includes techniques of Mantra-Yoga, as well as various contemplative and visualization disciplines.

**3.** In his book *Layayoga,* the modern exponent Shyam Sundar Goswami (1891-1978) brings out the deep connection between Laya-Yoga and Kundalinî-Yoga. The underlying process in both is the ascent of awakened serpent power up to the "thousand-spoked wheel" (*sahasrâra-cakra*) at the crown of the head. Goswami shares in his book many technical esoteric details, including the dynamics of subtle psychophysical energy. Goswami was the founder of the Goswami Institute of Yoga in Sweden, the first Indian institution of its kind in that country. He was a disciple of the great Yoga master Balak Bharati and also wrote *Hatha Yoga: An Advanced Method of Physical Education and Concentration*, which has long been out of print.


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## When Lightning Strikes

All I could think of was rushing up to my meditation room and sitting, once again, in front of that infernal, unproductive wall. No sooner had I done so than a huge, indescribable force *did* seize me, equally inside and outside my body and every cell. Immediately the wall disappeared, the world dropped away. All there was was this enormous force *breathing* me—the sound of my breath's great indrawing monumental and stupendous.

I was, however, incapable of dealing with It—my body panicked, knee jerk reflexed shamelessly. Instantly the force was gone. The room was back with its infernal wall; I was again my miserable little body and puny breath. The God had come as called but—it seems I hadn't really meant it. . .

Disciplines have always been around to awaken Kundalini through initiation. This works, though, only so long as a true genius-saint is there to evoke that response and nurture its growth.

—**Joseph Chilton Pearce**, *The Bond of Power,* pp. 123–124


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## FOR REFLECTION

**1.** Do you tend to be afraid of letting things go? What do you feel about the yogic prospect of dissolving your mind and ego? Does this fill you with delight or dread? How would you react to someone who offered to dissolve all your problems and fears instantly but would dissolve your ego-sense at the same time?

**2.** Have you ever had the experience of waking from sleep and not immediately knowing who or where you are? This happens to people occasionally, especially when traveling a lot. How did this make you feel? Were you anxious, relieved, or curious?

**3.** What emotions come up when you think about victims of Alzheimer's disease, who have no memory from one moment to the next? What inner reactions come up for you when contemplating the possibility of one day suffering from such a disease yourself? Do your reactions relate to the habit of identifying with the physical body? Do you equate memory with our true identity? If so, what are your reasons for doing so?

## REMEMBER

As we noted in the Practical Guidelines, we recommend that you write your responses to "For Reflection" and also to the Homework questions in your notebook. Many students have found this very helpful in assimilating yogic ideas and making them relevant to their daily life and spiritual practice.


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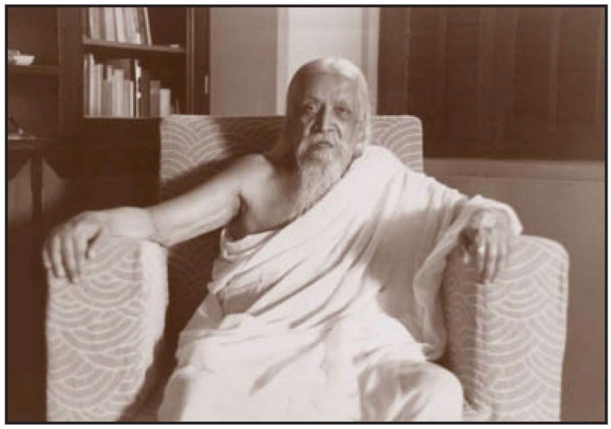
# IX. Integral Yoga: A Modern Synthesis

**(YT, pp. 55-58)**

"In the right view both of life and of Yoga, all life is either consciously or subconsciously a Yoga."

**—Sri Aurobindo**
*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 2

## Overview



This section in YT represents an attempt to cover Sri Aurobindo's complex Integral Yoga as succinctly as possible. I have decided to add the materials below to round out the discussion, as Aurobindo's philosophy continues to be translated into personal and social reality by his followers, especially those living in Auroville in Pondicherry, India.

Scholars and seekers alike will find in Sri Aurobindo an original philosopher committed to natural and human evolution, a yogi second to none in spiritual power, a visionary with a profound sense of the historical process, and the generator of a worldwide movement whose legacy, under the direction of the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, includes the UNESCO-sponsored city of Auroville.

**—Robert McDermott**
*The Essential Aurobindo* (Great Barrington, England:Lindisfarne Books, 2001), p. 11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ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #34

# Aurobindo's Life and Yoga

by Jagadish Dasa

## Sri Aurobindo: His Life and Times

Sri Aurobindo Ghose, the great Neo-Hindu mystic and social activist, holds his place among the great contemporary spiritual thinkers of India. Aurobindo was born on August 15, 1872, in West Bengal, and his father had him and his two siblings brought up and educated in England. He attended school in Darjeeling and later on in Cambridge and excelled in his studies, especially poetry.

Sri Aurobindo, age 12

After returning to India, Aurobindo held an administrative position in Baroda and taught at a college. Here, it is said, he began his practice of Yoga, which primarily consisted in breath control (*prânâyâma*). Later, Aurobindo became a radical underground leader in the independence movement against the British. Considered as one of the most dangerous revolutionaries by the British, and implicated in a bombing case, he was placed in an Alipore jail. During his term of imprisonment, he received visits from the renowned *jnâna-yogin* Swami Vivekananda.

While incarcerated, Aurobindo had a profound spiritual transformation, which he later explained as a revelation about the teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*. This text became a primary basis of his spiritual teachings. At that time, he began to receive inner guidance about his life and practice, instilling in him a deep sense of mission. Aurobindo attributed the development of his *yoga-darshana* (yogic system) to the intuitions that were welling up from within. Even though he met with a number of *yogins,* who instructed him in various *sâdhanas,* he always felt inspired directly by the divine principle. His teaching emphasizes the revelatory nature of the Divine that is dormant within everyone.


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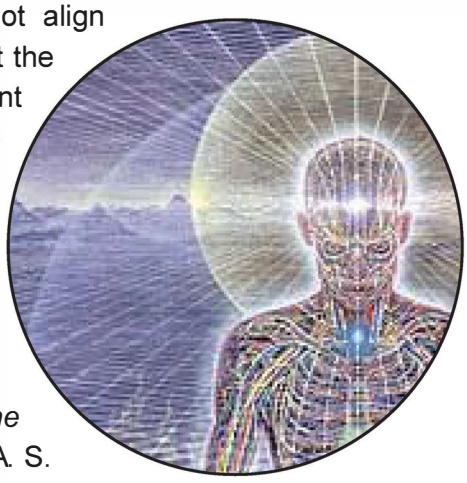
Shiva/Shakti

After his release, Aurobindo retired to Pondicherry, South India, to practice Yoga and further explore the great teachings of India's spiritual traditions. He felt that India's liberation was certain, and he shifted his attention to his own inner work, which, in turn, evolved into a vision of collective awakening for humanity. Aurobindo first lived with five students but later attracted a larger nucleus of disciples. In 1920, he was joined by Mira Richard, a French woman who saw in him Lord Krishna. Subsequently she became known as The Mother and was instrumental in the continuation of Aurobindo's legacy. In 1926, at Aurobindo's request, The Mother founded an *âshrama,* which gradually attracted a large community dedicated to the pursuit of the ideals of Integral Yoga. This community now resides in Auroville, a city in the making. The community has c. 1,500 members but is planned to expand to a maximum of 50,000—all dedicated to Aurobindo's and The Mother's evolutionary vision.

What is interesting about Aurobindo is his practice of various *sâdhanas* by which he gained access to a range of traditions. His open-minded synthesizing orientation appeals to many today who feel constricted by tradition or limited by others' models of reality. Aurobindo himself had contact with a few great teachers who inspired him, but he always turned within for guidance.

## Aurobindo's Teaching



Detail of painting by Alex Grey

As a formidable synthesizer, Sri Aurobindo did not align himself with any one tradition but rather sought to bring out the essence of the diverse teachings of Yoga as they are relevant to modern times. As a philosopher, he had his own unique take on just about every topic—from the *Vedas* and Indian cultural history to human evolution, poetry and, of course, Yoga. As a practitioner and realizer, he brought together his intuitive understanding of the yogic processes with his deep sensitivity and intuition about human nature. A number of his essays have been compiled in major works such as *Essays on the Gita, The Life Divine, The Synthesis of Yoga,* and *The Secret of the Veda*. A recent compilation of his teachings is A. S. Dalal's *A Greater Psychology: An Introduction to the Psychological Thought of Sri Aurobindo*.

Aurobindo's teaching is known as *pûrna-yoga* (translated as "Integral Yoga"). He draws traditional concepts from practically all the philosophical systems of India. It is easy to see that he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culled concepts from the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, and the Shaiva and Shâkta *Âgamas*, but clearly Aurobindo evaluated each notion in the light of his own unique perspective on Yoga. He also developed a new terminology and, most importantly, incorporated modern evolutionary theory into his philosophical edifice. Aurobindo saw purpose in the evolution of the world and humanity, and his prophetic message about the evolutionary unfolding of the world into what he called the Divine Life has been his distinctive contribution to contemporary, integral spirituality.

In the right view of life and of Yoga all life is either consciously or subconsciously a Yoga.

**—Sri Aurobindo**
*The Synthesis of Yoga,* p. 2

Philosophically, Aurobindo's system is set apart from the monistic trends in Indian thought and can be said to represent a certain advance in nondualistic metaphysics. Aurobindo accepts the indeterminate fullness (*pûrna*) of the ultimate Reality, which he symbolizes as a masculine principle that can be realized as infinite Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss. The Absolute, however, can be realized only through its counterpart, the feminine principle. Reality is an inseparable whole—Spirit/Nature, Consciousness/Energy, or Shiva/Shakti. This view resonates strongly with the nondualistic variety of Tantra and has been called "integral nondualism."

According to Aurobindo's model, God is at once Spirit and Energy, or Shakti. In its highest manifestation, the Absolute is described as the inconceivable, primordial One. "Sacchidananda"—existence (*sat*), con-sciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ânanda*)—is the dynamic aspect of the Absolute that brings about the involution and evolution of the world. It is pure potentiality and is accessible only to the supramental consciousness, which I will discuss shortly.

## Shakti

The Absolute is only realizable through the creative force behind Nature's manifestation, a consciousness force called the Supermind or the supramental consciousness. The Supermind gives the evolutionary process of Nature an ultimate direction. According to Aurobindo, our consciousness is destined to evolve from our present limited mind to Higher Mind, then to Illumined Mind, next to Intuitive Mind, and further to Overmind, which will serve as a bridge to the Supermind, the Omega point of evolution.

Aldous Huxley and Nobel laureate Pearl S. Buck, among others, independently nominated Sri Aurobindo for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Aurobindo's Integral Yoga focuses on conscious cooperation of all life with the evolutionary impulse, or Shakti, and the corresponding reception of grace. Through this conscious effort to unite with the will of the Divine, as expressed through the evolutionary impulse, the Divine Life can manifest, which implies a complete transformation of the condition of the world.


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## The Evolving World

To Aurobindo, the world is the revelation of God. God evolves as the world. The emergent consciousness is what he called the descent of the Supermind. Thus the maturing of the world amounts to an "unpacking of God." Aurobindo viewed Nature as the outer expression of Divine Nature, also known as Sacchidananda. Supermind, once again, is the power of manifestation, an aspect of this Divine Nature, or Shakti, which consciously directs the course of evolution.

In Aurobindo's philosophy, evolution means the collective attainment of the same inner growth that individuals can achieve. Through grace, individuals can perfect Integral Yoga and become what Aurobindo called a Gnostic being, supramental being, or superman. This profound state of existence entails a complete transformation of the body-mind similar to the transubstantiated body of a Tantric master, called *siddha-deha*. Aurobindo believed that our species can manifest Spirit in the physical realm.

For him, God is pure potentiality, and in order to actualize the divine potential, God caused the emergence of self-aware humanity. Humanity, in turn, must consciously cooperate with the will of the Divine reflected in Nature's evolutionary impulse to complete this process. The perfection of Spirit embodied or actualized in this world is the Divine Life.

In voicing this evolutionary prospect, Aurobindo was perhaps the first to clearly address the notion of ascending and descending currents of spirituality, a concept made familiar in contemporary spirituality through the works of Ken Wilber and other integral philosophers. "Ascent" refers to the inward and upward impulse to reach beyond the conceptual mind to a state of pure awareness through meditation, whereas "descent" refers to the movement toward embodiment, externalization, or the active life. It entails bringing down, or manifesting, the creative potential of the Divine, the Supermind, or supramental consciousness.

> Nature is Prakriti, Maya, Shakti. If we look at her on her most external side where she seems the opposite of Purusha, she is Prakriti, an inert and mechanical self-driven operaton. . . . If we look at her on her other, internal side where she moves nearer to unity with Purusha, she is Maya, will of being and becoming or of cessation from being and becoming with all their results, apparent to the consciousness, of involution and evolution.
>
> **—Sri Aurobindo**
>
> *The Synthesis of Yoga,* p. 601

## The Spiritual Process and Stages of Conscious Development

Aurobindo's philosophy is based on a series of personal experiences and intuitions growing out of intensive yogic practice.


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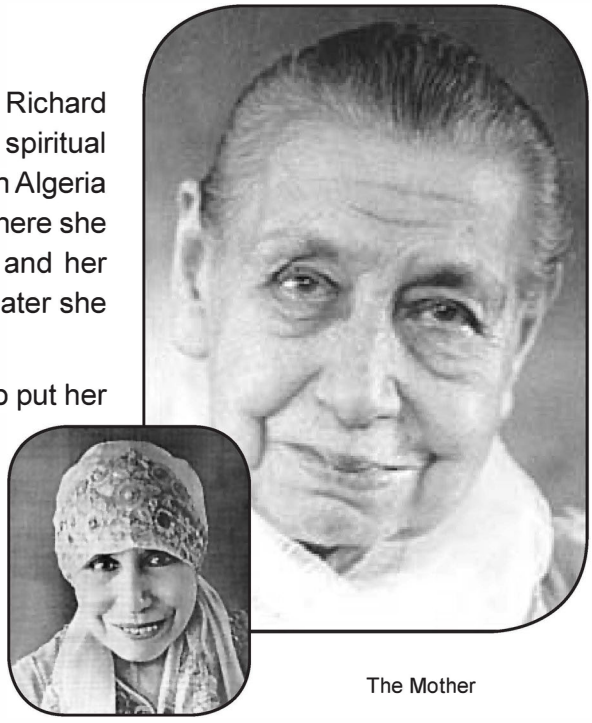
His own transformation is chronicled in his narrative poem *Savitri*, which he created over three decades and which swelled to 23,837 lines. It is a symbolic rendering of the process of individual and cosmic evolution.

Aurobindo emphasizes three major developmental events in an individual's inner life: the unitive experience with the transcendent Reality, the full awakening of the powers dormant in our psychophysical make-up, and the harmony in action with the evolutionary force of Nature. The fulfillment of individual human life lies in embracing the will of the Divine in helping to bring down the dynamism of the Absolute whereby the world and life itself become transfigured. These achievements are connected with the following three phases:

- Psychic phase — practitioners realize within themselves the soul or inmost being. Connecting with this sense of higher (innate) selfhood, their being becomes more refined and their attention is naturally drawn to the higher calling.
- Spiritual phase — practitioners transcend the body-mind and awaken to the infinite nature of the Self.
- Supramental — practitioners manifest the divine potential, bridging the infinite power of the One with the phenomenal world. A radical transformation of the body/mind complex occurs at this stage. This is the state of the gnostic being, superman, or supramental being.

## The Mother

Aurobindo found a spiritual partner in Mira Richard (née Alfassa), who had already individually showed spiritual competence as a teacher in France. She was born in Algeria in 1887 and in her childhood relocated to France, where she eventually married Paul Richard, a diplomat. She and her husband visited Aurobindo in 1915, and five years later she joined him as his partner.



The Mother

Recognizing her spiritual maturity, Aurobindo put her in charge of his *âshrama* soon after her decision to stay in Pondicherry in 1920. Later she was given the name The Mother, and Aurobindo himself claimed that through an attitude of selfless surrender to the Divine Feminine, which she made manifest on Earth, the process of spiritual transformation could be completed. After his departure, he announced, The Mother would serve as a conduit for the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descent of the supramental energy. She continued to direct the *âshrama* and teach students until her death in 1974. Prior to her passing, The Mother affirmed that the Supermind had been able to enter the Earth field, thus inaugurating a new and promising era in human history.

## FOR REFLECTION

**1**. What are your views on the connection between science and spirituality? Are they compatible or incompatible? Is it meaningful to seek to approach spirituality in a scientific way? Alternatively, is it meaningful to want to spiritualize science?

**2.** How do you envision the relationship between Spirit and Nature? Are they stark opposites? Complementary realities? The same reality? How do your ideas on this subject affect (or should affect) the way you relate to the world?

**3**. Do you think traditional yogic practices must be modified to fit the capacities and needs of contemporary practitioners? Or should we simply adjust to the ancient teachings?

**4.** What makes a specific teaching or path appealing to us? Is it simply our personal conditioning, or are their other factors involved? If you have chosen a path, do you feel your decision came out of an understanding of your personal nature? Would you describe it as an inner call or inherent faith? Did a specific experience validate a certain path for you? Did you come to it by logical analysis of the merit of its goals? Do you remain noncommittal or not drawn to any specific model of spiritual life?

**5.** Do you feel a need for inner integration? And what does this mean to you?

**6.** What do you think of the notion expressed by some Hindu traditionalists that the branches of Yoga—like Raja-Yoga, Hatha-Yoga, Karma-Yoga, and Bhakti-Yoga—are not independent pathways but rather aspects of *one* yogic path and ought to be practiced together?


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Aurobindo understood the dynamics of human experience as resting on will, feeling, and understanding. In the traditional paths, these three capacities were dealt with in Karma-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, and Jnâna-Yoga respectively. In Integral Yoga, the capacities of will, feeling, and understanding are cultivated harmoniously, and spiritual transformation is thought to occur by the grace of Shakti, though informal practices are engaged in. Selfless surrender is thus the basis of Integral Yoga. Through work as service and an offering to the Divine, as well as through contemplation and prayer, the practitioner prepares for divine grace.

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Sri Aurobindo at work


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# QUESTIONNAIRE #7

Please SUBMIT this questionnaire to TYS: tyslearning@sasktel.net
Don't forget to include your full name, email address, date, and course title. Please refer to our instructions on p. 17.

**1. Strictly speaking, what is a *mantra*?** *(Select one or more)*

(a) a scary sound
(b) a sacred sound
(c) a sound that is given by a *guru* as a *mantra*
(d) any sound that has been designated as a *mantra*
(e) any word from the *Rig-Veda*
(f) a specific sound, word, or phrase listed in the textbooks of Mantra-Yoga

**2. Which of the following is Not a limb of Mantra-Yoga.** *(Select one or more)*

(a) posture
(b) breath control
(c) ritual bathing
(d) chanting
(e) self-transcending service to others
(f) purificatory practices
(g) recitation
(h) moral conduct
(i) devotion
(j) meditation
(k) ecstasy
(l) ritual worship of the teacher

**3. Which of the following is a correct definition of *sphota-vâda*?** *(Select one)*

(a) the teaching that states that meaning is arbitrary
(b) the teaching that looks upon the connection between words and meanings as eternal
(c) the teaching that regards meaning as essential to words once meaning has been assigned
(d) the teaching that claims that only sacred words have meaning


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**4. Which of the following branches of Yoga involve the awakening of the "serpent power" (*kundalinî-shakti)*?** *(Select one or more)*

(a) Karma-Yoga
(b) Râja-Yoga of Patanjali
(c) Mantra-Yoga
(d) Bhakti-Yoga
(e) Hatha-Yoga
(f) Laya-Yoga
(g) Tantra-Yoga
(h) Siddha-Yoga
(i) Jnâna-Yoga

**5. What does the Sanskrit word *laya* mean literally?** *(Select one)*

(a) assimilation
(b) meditation
(c) dissolution
(d) resolution

**6. Which of the following best describes Sri Aurobindo's teaching?** *(Select one)*

(a) spiritual dynamism
(b) yogic evolutionism
(c) philosophical syncretism
(d) Tantra
(e) Vedânta
(f) traditional verticalism

**7. Did Sri Aurobindo reject asceticism in favor of a more world-positive lifestyle?** *(Select one)*

(a) yes, he considered asceticism as a wrong path
(b) no, he embraced asceticism
(c) no, he incorporated asceticism but did not give it supreme importance
(d) no, he used ascetical means but rejected the theory behind traditional asceticism


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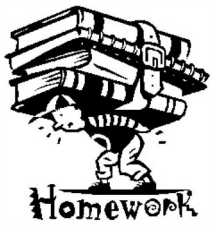
# LESSON 8

## I. Objectives

This lesson has the following two objectives:

- to help you grasp the development of India's culture and philosophy in rough outlines
- to explain the core practices of asceticism (*tapas*) and renunciation (*samnyâsa*)

## II. Homework Assignments




- **Read** sections I–III of Chapter 3 in *The Yoga Tradition* book (pp. 59–72)
- **Read** all materials of Lesson 8 in this Study Guide, including Additional Study Materials #35–36.
- **Ponder** the questions under "For Reflection" and jot down your significant thoughts.
- **Answer Questionnaire #8 and submit.**
- **Practical Assignment:** Make a genuine effort to unclutter your life. Every week, for the duration of this lesson, look around your home and collect surplus items in a box and then take the box to one of the many nonprofit organizations that would be glad to accept your unwanted stuff. By all means continue this good practice even after you are done with this particular lesson!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## III. Introductory Remarks

The Indic culture is reckoned among the oldest on Earth. Some authorities would even argue that it is the oldest continuous culture that we know. The history of Yoga is closely tied to the evolution of Indic culture as a whole, and it is as vast as it is little known. The periods of historical development mapped out briefly in this lesson are little more than guideposts.

Hinduism, which is often wrongly identified with the Indic culture as a whole, is really only a *phase* within a protracted cultural development on the Indian subcontinent. Another common misconception is to regard Hinduism as a religion, whereas it is really more appropriately viewed as a cultural complex, which emerged in India in the post-Buddhist era and more particularly with the culture reflected in the *Purânas* of 1,000 A.D. and later.

Yoga antedates Hinduism as understood here, and its historical roots reach far back into the Vedic age and possibly earlier. At the same time, however, Yoga in the form especially of Patanjali's Classical Yoga is considered one of the six traditional *systems* of philosophy.

In the broadest sense, Yoga is spirituality as it has evolved in the context of India's diversified culture. From the earliest times, it has been associated with two powerful practices—asceticism (*tapas*) and renunciation (*samnyâsa*). Both are central to Yoga and are present in one or another form in all branches of Yoga. Even the disciplined ethical approach of Karma-Yoga can be and has been understood as asceticism.

Asceticism can be compared to the plus pole of a magnet and renunciation to the minus pole. The former consists in creating new and better imprints in the mind of the yogic practitioner, whereas the latter consists in letting go of old and undesirable imprints that keep the karmic nexus in place. The proper dynamic between asceticism and renunciation leads the yogic practitioner toward liberation.

Asceticism and renunciation are valuable focal points for understanding the complex tradition of Yoga.


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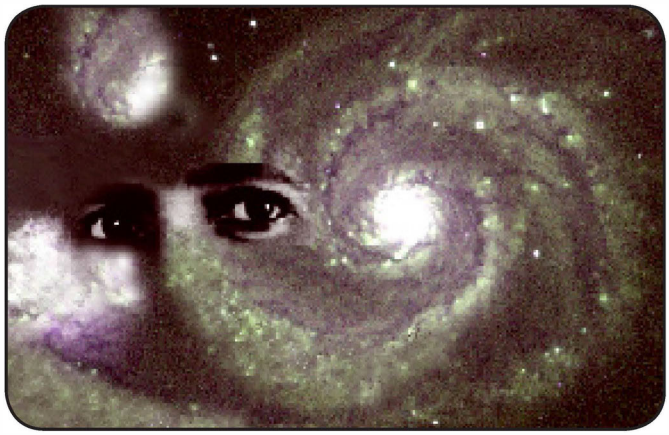
# Yoga and Other Hindu Traditions

**(YT, pp. 59–90)**

## I. A Bird's-Eye View of the Cultural History of India

### Main Points



**1.** Hinduism refers to the cultural complex that has developed out of the ancient **Vedic** civilization of five thousand and more years ago. At the heart of Hinduism is the revealed knowledge (*shruti*) of the *Vedas* and its subsequent interpretations and applications. The religious practices and philosophical ideas of Hinduism, however, were largely shaped by the "popular" teachings of the *Purânas* and *Tantras*.

**2.** Hindu society and culture are founded on the *varna-âshrama* model, better known as the system of social estates (*varna*) and life stages (*âshrama*). The four social estates or classes—priests, warriors, merchants, and laborers—evolved into the inflexible caste (*jâti*) system. This model has its conceptual roots in the Vedic hymnodies, specifically the *purusha-sûkta* ("Hymn of Man") of the *Rig-Veda*. The Hindu socio-cultural complex revolves around an exclusivist tradition of sacred knowledge involving the religious hierarchy of *brahmins* and their elaborate ritualism, which remains intact even today. Buddhism, Tantra, and marginal ascetic groups have opposed this brahmanical exclusivism, especially the rigid caste system.

**3.** Hinduism is marked by ideological flexibility, that is, the ability to embrace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a wide range of viewpoints, including those that seem contradictory. Despite Hinduism's immense diversity, it also has a recognizable homogeneity, which derives from the fact that its many cultural strands and traditions draw from the same pool of basic values, beliefs, and practices. Most, though not all, Hindu traditions share a deep respect for the authority of the *Vedas*.

**4.** According to Hindu thought, four aims or values are central to human life: *dharma* (morality), *artha* (wealth, economic development), *kâma* (aesthetic or sensual pleasure), and *moksha* (liberation). The Yoga tradition emphasizes the liberation teachings at the heart of Hindu thought, but the human aspiration for ultimate freedom is impossible to divorce from the other values. Only when *dharma, artha,* and *kâma* are pursued separately from the supreme goal of liberation do they run counter to the spiritual process.

**5.** The widespread tradition of Tantra, which understands itself as a new revelation for the Dark Age (superseding the Vedic revelation) considers the pursuit of *artha, dharma,* and *kâma* not only as viable but even necessary for a balanced life.

**6.** The material presented in this course is based on a thorough revision of the history of India from pre-Vedic times to the present. From this new viewpoint the historical development of Hindu India can be organized into nine periods. The timeline given below contains approximate dates for the significant historical periods. We have listed a number of defining historical events as well as important Yoga scriptures that were created during these diverse periods. For a more elaborate chronology, see pp. 445–452 of *The Yoga Tradition* book. Please understand that all these figures are approximate and that this chronology is only a *model* that seeks to avoid a complete muddle.

- **Pre-Vedic Age** (7500–4500 B.C.) — This is the era of the cultures of the Neolithic period. Some Indian scholars think that the *Rig-Veda* dates back to that early

## On the Veda

The Veda possesses the high spiritual substance of the Upanishads, but lacks their phraseology; it is an inspired knowledge as yet insufficiently equipped with intellectual and philosophical terms. We find a language of poets and illuminates to whom all experience is real, vivid, sensible, even concrete, not yet of thinkers and systematisers to whom the realities of the mind and soul have become abstractions. Yet a system, a doctrine there is; but its structure is supple, its terms are concrete, the cast of its thought is practical and experimental, but in the accomplished type of an old and sure experience, not of one that is crude and uncertain because yet in the making. Here we have the ancient psychological science and the art of spiritual living of which the Upanishads are the philosophical outcome and modification and Vedanta, Sankhya and Yoga the late intellectual result and logical dogma.

**—Sri Aurobindo**
*On the Veda,* p. 384


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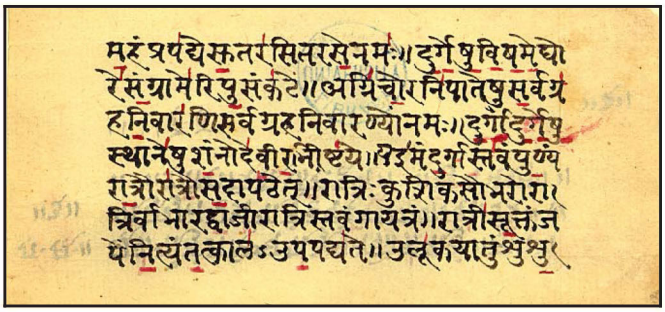
age, which, if true, would require us to rename this era.



Manuscript page of the *Rig-Veda* featuring the Hymn to Night (*râtrî-sûkta*)

- **Vedic Age** (4500–2500/2000 B.C.) — This era is marked by the sacrificial mysticism of the *Vedas* and the Indus-Sarasvati civilization (3000–2000 B.C.). Our time frame for the *Vedas* is hypothetical but allows for the gradual evolution of Vedic Sanskrit (called *ârsha,* derived from *rishi* or "seer") into the Sanskrit of the *Brâhmanas* and *Upanishads*. In any case, the *Vedas* must be placed not later than 1900 B.C., which is the proposed date for the drying up of the Sarasvati River, mentioned in the *Rig-Veda* as the largest river in Northern India. Since aerial photography has revealed numerous settlements along that now vanished river, we must allow at least several hundred years for the growth of that culture. This makes the *Vedas* synchronous with the so-called Indus civilization. Because of the great consistency between the archaelogical artifacts of the Indus civilization and the evidence found in the *Vedas,* there are no stringent reasons for regarding the Indus civilization and the Vedic civilization as separate. In fact, we are siding with those scholars who favor the view that both are one and the same, which we call the Indus-Sarasvati civilization.

Harappan artifact

- **The Brahmanical Age** (2500/2000–1500 B.C.) — During this era, the *Brâhmanas* (ritual texts based on the *Vedas*) were composed and the whole hierarchical culture of the *brahmins* evolved. This is also the period during which the *Âranyakas* (ritual texts for forest-dwelling ascetics) were created, which prepared the ideological and practical ground for the teachings of the *Upanishads*.

- **The Post-Vedic/Upanishadic Age** (1500–1000 B.C.) — This era is marked by the teachings of the early *Upanishads* (gnostic texts), which for the first time speak clearly about Self-realization, *karma*, and rebirth. Strictly speaking, however, the Post-Vedic Age commenced with the completion of the Vedic *Samhitâs* (*Rig-, Yajur-, Sâma-,* and *Atharva-Veda*), so that already the *Brâhmanas* could be considered Post-Vedic.

- **The Pre-Classical or Epic Age** (1000–100 B.C.) — This era witnessed the emergence of Sâmkhya-Yoga (as found in the *Mahâbhârata* and *Râmâyana* epics), and also of the Yoga-based cultures of Buddhism and Jainism.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- **The Classical Age** (100 B.C.–500 A.D.) — This era was one of great systematization within Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Hinduism produced important scriptures like Bâdarâyana's *Brahma-Sûtra* (c. 200 B.C.–300 A.D.), Patanjali's *Yoga-Sûtra* (c. 150 A.D.), and Îshvara Krishna's *Sâmkhya-Kârikâ* (c. 450 A.D.). This was the period of the famous Gupta dynasty (320–c. 500 A.D.), which supported the arts, sciences, and philosophy.

- **The Tantric/Purânic Age** (500–1300 A.D.) — During this era, the *Tantras* and *Purânas* were created, whose teachings purported to be for the "new age" (that is, the *kali-yuga,* or Dark Age). Still, these teachings, which influenced all of Hindu culture to varying degrees, were possibly much older.

Manuscript page of a *Purâna*

- **The Sectarian Age** (1300–1700 A.D.) — This era witnessed the rise of "sectarian" schools within the great spiritual-religious traditions of Vaishnaivism, Shaivism, and Shaktism. The focus of these schools is on devotionalism (*bhakti-mârga*), which gives the yogic teachings a religious slant. The phrase "Sectarian Age" is not altogether satisfactory, although there is a tendency toward sectarianism within these three great spiritual-religious communities of Hinduism.

- **Modern Age** (1700–Present) — This is the era in which the contact between India and the West has grown increasingly intense. First Dutch and then British trading companies were established in India in the early 1600s. In 1661, Bombay was ceded to King Charles II on the occasion of his marriage to the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza. The British Raj was established in 1858 and was to last until India's independence in 1947.

Queen Victoria, empress of India from 1877 until her death in 1901. She had an interest in Yoga and other aspects of traditional India and granted several audiences to the long-living Shivapuri Baba.

The above chronology is in opposition to the still widely used Aryan invasion theory, a theory that proposes the implantation of a supposedly nonindigenous "Aryan" culture into India during the time of the so-called Indus civilization. The Aryan invasion theory implies that the original yogic teachings, as found in the sacred *Vedas,* were imported into India. Recent research, however, has shown that this scholarly model is a fanciful construct—a modern myth—that is tied to a strong Eurocentric bias and political motivations. The work of the American archaeologist James G. Shaffer was decisive in reappraising this model inherited from 19th-century scholarship. The new model is supported by ample evidence gathered in various other disciplines.


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[Prof. Klaus Klostermaier is among the growing number of scholars who support the recently revised chronology of ancient India. Basham and Smith, writing earlier, distinctly favored the Aryan invasion model. For more information, see *The Yoga Tradition*, Chapter 4, and *Study Guide* thereon.]


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## FOR REFLECTION

**1.** Does taking up the yogic (spiritual) path necessarily mean denying all one's worldly desires? Is this even possible? Or is "denying" the wrong word here? And what about the desire for liberation? Which desires are prominent in your own life? If you were a wise old Yoga master, what would you tell yourself about them?

**2.** How do you relate to the four goals of human life according to Hinduism? Are there any goals that you are fixated on, and that have you in their grip rather than vice versa? For instance, what is your relationship to material wealth and comfort? Do you seek it, wish for it, or (if you have it) take it for granted? Or do you tend to dismiss or belittle it?

**3.** All societies have stratification. How does the social stratification of your own society affect your lifestyle and, more importantly, your thinking? This kind of consideration really requires some psychological archaeology.

**4.** What is your present picture of early human civilization? Does it correspond to any of the ideas presented in *The Yoga Tradition*? Or do these challenge your views? Observe your emotions when encountering different opinions or beliefs, or facts that contradict your own views. What feelings tend to typically arise in your case? How do you customarily deal with them? Have you imbibed the yogic ideal of *sama-darshana,* or regarding everything with an even, calm attitude?

## REMEMBER

As we noted before, we recommend that you write your responses to "For Reflection" and also to the Homework questions in your notebook. Many students have found this very helpful in assimilating yogic ideas and making them relevant to their daily life and spiritual practice.


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# II. The Glow of Psychic Power: Yoga and Asceticism

**(YT, pp. 65-67)**

## Main Points

**1.** *Tapas* means "glow" or "heat" and can be roughly defined as asceticism or austerity, and it also stands for the inner (psychosomatic) "heat" generated by means of ascetic practices. This "inner heat" refers to the fire of transformation. As we will see, *tapas* is an element that can be found in practically all schools of Yoga in one form or another. The performer of ascetism is called a *tapasvin*. Please note that *tapas*—like the terms *manas* (mind), *rajas* (dynamism), and *ojas* (vitality)—is a singular (neuter) noun.

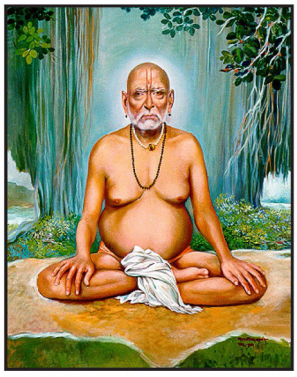
**2.** The concept and practice of *tapas* is found in the *Vedas, Brâhmanas, Âranyakas, Upanishads,* the two great Indian epics (*Mahâbhârata* and *Râmâyana*), *Purânas*, *Âgamas,* and *Tantras,* as well as other literary genres.

**3.** The seers of the *Rig-Veda* taught how creation is manifested through the *tapas* of the Primordial Being. Spiritual or yogic practice is in imitation of that Primordial Being, or Cosmic Man. Those engaged in the Vedic ritual Yoga reenacted this original sacred act of self-giving on a microcosmic scale (i.e., the human body-mind). *Tapas* served the purpose of achieving visionary experiences, including the insights that informed the *rishis,* who revealed the hymns of the *Vedas*.

**4.** *Tapas* is a means to harness the potent energy of the body-mind and the universe in order to achieve both spiritual and material ends. The *Atharva-Veda* speaks of the deities achieving immortality through penance and chastity. In the epics and *Purânas,* there are many accounts of sages and ascetics who, employing *tapas,* attained

*Asceticism,* when used in a religious context, may be defined as a voluntary, sustained, and at least partially systematic program of self-discipline and self-denial in which immediate, sensual or profane gratifications are renounced in order to attain a higher spiritual state or a more thorough absorption in the sacred.

**—Walter Kaelber**
The *Encyclopedia of Religion*



Akkalkot Avadhûta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various paranormal abilities (*siddhi*) or procured boons from the deities.

**5.** *Tapas* was the most widely employed term for yogic practices before the word *yoga* acquired its technical sense. In the late Epic Age, *tapas* was incorporated into the fold of yogic praxis. Then, in Patanjali's *Yoga-Sûtra*, *tapas* is mentioned as one of the disciplines of self-restraint (*niyama*), as well as an integral element of Kriyâ-Yoga, as defined by Patanjali.

Vedic God Rudra

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #35**

# Tapas: Creative Fire

by Georg Feuerstein

According to Hindu mythology, in order to create the universe, the Divine Being voluntarily underwent intense self-discipline. This cosmic Yoga caused the Divine Being to sweat, thus producing out of its pores the cosmos with its countless beings and things. The process of voluntary self-limitation and self-challenge bears the name *tapas* in Sanskrit, which means literally "heat" or "glow."

The ancient sages (*rishi*) pointed to the Sun as the primary practitioner of *tapas* and in fact as the originator of Yoga. Often Westerners think of Patanjali as the "Father of Yoga," but this honorific title rightly belongs to Hiranyagarbha ("Golden Germ/Womb"). Even though in bygone ages, there may well have been a teacher by that name, Hiranyagarbha first and foremost denotes the Sun. In the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (4.1), the Sun—called Vivasvat—is referred to as the primordial teacher of ancient Yoga. The Sun necessarily also was the first teacher of *tapas*, since *tapas* is at the heart of all yogic disciplines. Indeed, before the word *yoga* was used in its technical meaning of "spiritual discipline," the term *tapas* enjoyed wide currency. Subsequently, it acquired more the connotation of "asceticism" or "austerity."

*Tapas* is any practice that pushes the body-mind against its own limits, and the key ingredient of *tapas* is endurance. Thus in the archaic *Rig-Veda* (10.136), the long-haired ascetic


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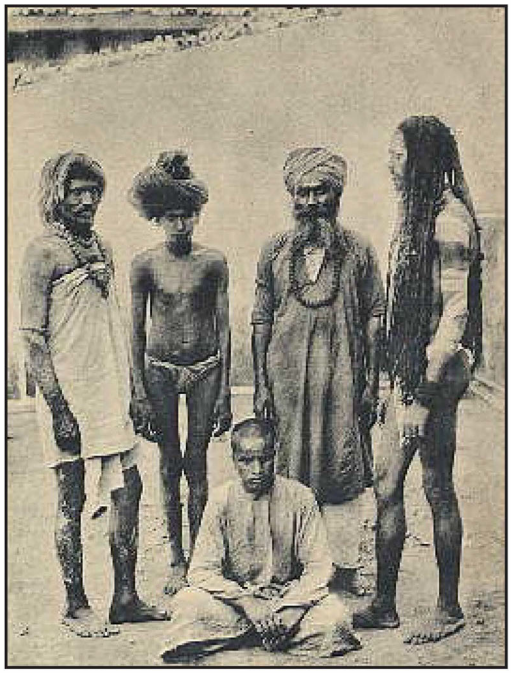
or *keshin* is said to "endure" the world, to "endure" fire, and to "endure" poison. The *keshin* is a type of renouncer, a proto-*yogin*, who is a "wind-girt" (naked?) companion of the wild God Rudra ("Howler"). He is said to "ascend" the wind in a God-intoxicated state and to fly through space, looking down upon all things. But the name *keshin* harbors a deeper meaning, for it also can refer to the Sun whose "long hair" is made up of the countless rays that emanate from the solar orb and reach far into the cosmos and bestow life on Earth. This is again a reminder that the archaic Yoga of the *Vedas* revolves around the solar spirit, who selflessly feeds all beings with his compassionate warmth.



A group of ascetics

The early name for the *yogin* is *tapasvin,* the practitioner of *tapas* or voluntary self-challenge. The *tapasvins* live always at the edge. They deliberately challenge their body and mind, applying formidable will power to whatever practice they vow to undertake. They may choose to stand stock-still under India's hot Sun for hours on end, surrounded by a wall of heat from four fires lit close by. Or they may resolve to sit naked in solitary meditation on a windswept mountain peak in below-zero temperatures. Or they may opt to incessantly chant a divine name, forfeiting sleep for a specified number of days. The possibilities for *tapas* are endless.

*Tapas* begins with denying ourselves a simple desire—having a satisfying cup of coffee, a piece of chocolate, or casual sex. Instead of instant gratification, we choose postponement. Then, gradually, postponement can be stepped up to become complete renunciation of a desire. This kind of challenge to our habit patterns causes a certain degree of frustration in us. We begin to "stew in our own juices," and this generates psychic energy that can be used to power the process of self-transformation. As we become increasingly able to gain control over our impulses, we experience the delight behind creative self-frustration. We see that we are growing and that self-denial need not necessarily be negative.

The *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (17.14-16) speaks of three kinds of austerity or *tapas:* austerity of body, speech, and mind. Austerity of the body includes purity, rectitude, chastity, nonharming, and making offerings to higher beings, sages, *brahmins* (the custodians of the spiritual legacy of India), and honored teachers. Austerity of speech encompasses speaking kind, truthful, and beneficial words that give no offence, as well as the regular practice of recitation (*svâdhyâya*) of the sacred lore. Austerity of the mind consists of serenity, gentleness, silence, self-restraint, and pure emotions.

According to the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (17.17), a rounded spiritual practice entails all three kinds of penance, and it is practiced with great faith (*shraddhâ*) and without expectation of reward. Such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*tapas* is informed primarily by the quality of *sattva,* which stands for the principle of lucidity in the inner and outer world. The kind of austerity that has a predominance of the quality of *rajas,* the principle of dynamism in Nature, tends to be practiced with an ulterior motive, such as gaining respect, honor, or reverence, or for the sake of selfish display. Because of this, it also tends to be unstable and of short duration. When the quality of *tamas,* standing for the principle of inertia, characterizes the practice of austerity, it leads to foolish self-torture or injury to others.

*Sattva, rajas,* and *tamas* are the three primary constituents of Nature (*prakriti*). All created things, including the human psyche or mind, are a composite of these three factors called *gunas*. Since *tapas* depends on the mind of the Yoga practitioner, it is colored by these three as they manifest in a particular individual. Depending on the quality of a practitioner's *tapas*, he or she will harvest the corresponding results. Unless the practice of austerity has a strong *sattva* ingredient, these results can range from physical pain and anguish to a complete failure of the spiritual process.

For instance, if a person practices *tapas* in order to acquire paranormal abilities (*siddhi*) that will impress or overpower others, he or she consolidates rather than transcends the ego and thus becomes diverted from the path. If, again, a practitioner confuses the balanced self-challenge of genuine *tapas* with merely painful penance, springing from sheer ignorance and a subconscious masochism, he or she is bound to reap only pain and suffering that will undermine his or her physical health, possibly contributing to emotional instability or even mental illness.

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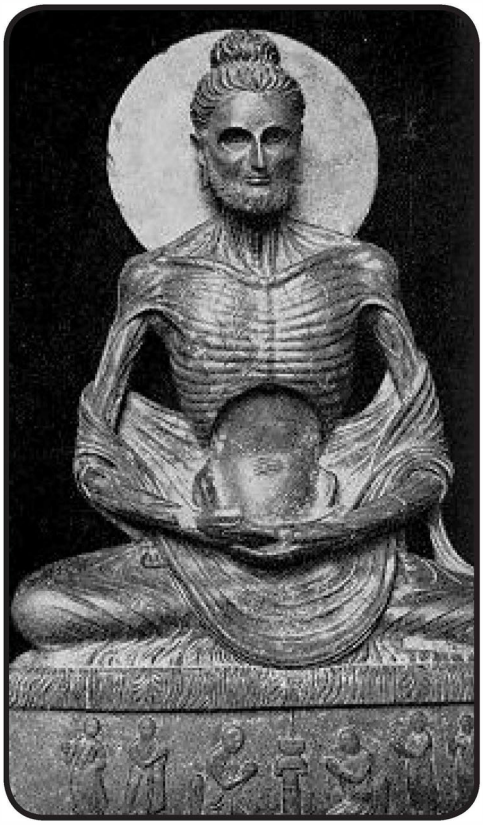

## Asceticism and Gautama the Buddha

Two and a half thousand years ago, Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, learned the important difference between genuine (i.e., self-transcending) *tapas* and misconceived pen-ance. For six long years he pushed himself until his bodily frame became emaciated and was close to collapse, but still without yielding the longed-for spiritual freedom. Then his inner wisdom led him to take the middle path (*madhya-mârga*) beyond damaging extremes. Gautama abandoned his severe, self-destructive *tapas* and nourished his body properly. His fellow ascetics, who had always looked to him for inspiration, thought he had returned to a worldly life and shunned him. Later, after Gautama's spiritual awakening, their paths crossed again and his radiance was so impressive that they could not help but bow to him with utmost respect.

Genuine *tapas* makes us shine like the Sun. Then we can be a source of warmth and strength for others.

Both in the pre-Christian and the Christian era (starting c. 300 A.D.), saints were typically depicted with a halo (or nimbus)—a symbol of their radiance. This luminosity is due to a preponderance of *sattva,* which also is responsible for the accompanying joy or mood of ecstasy.


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# FOR REFLECTION

**1.** How much creative *tapas* is in your own life and practice right now? Could you step up your practice of *tapas*? Do you think it is possible to grow spiritually without the element of *tapas*? Can you think of some examples of *tapas* becoming self-destructive?

**2.** Read verses 17.14-19 of the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, which deal with different types of austerity or penance. Which type fits your own efforts? What practical implications, if any, does this have for you?

**3.** Consider how you can experiment with austerity in your life according to your personal life circumstances. Think of the sense organs and the activities of the mind. These are the faculties to be restrained. For example, austerity of the tongue could include watching your diet, refraining from speaking negative statements, or maintaining silence for a designated period. Austerity involving the eyes might involve not watching violent movies, or of the ears might involve not listening to gossip about other's alleged faults or not listening to jarring music. In regard to touch, one can try dressing moderately in common cloth and avoiding unnecessary physical contact with others. Austerity of the mind involves bringing the mind always back to stillness and refraining from thoughts of attachment or aversion in any circumstance. The objective is to learn about one's level of conditioning and the need to be comforted or occupied by stimulation of the senses or the mind.

**4.** For spiritual benefit, all *tapas* must be performed within the context of nonviolence to self and others. Consider the powerful influence of Gandhi's intentional fasting during the time when India was rallying for independence. Gandhi saw the spiritual welfare of his people tied in with the existing social conditions of his time. His views on penance were drawn under the inspiration of the teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*. We will explore how this ethic of self-sacrifice, or penance pursued in the cause of spiritual development, remains a vital element in yogic teachings.

**Please take the time to really consider the *For Reflection* questions. The time for this exercise has been allowed for in the course program. Besides, you can only benefit from this exercise in self-inspection.**


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# III. Delight in Nothing: Yoga and the Way of Renunciation

**(YT, pp. 67-72)**

## Main Points

**1.** *Samnyâsa* (sometimes spelled *sannyâsa*) stands for renunciation, and practitioners of *samnyâsa* are called *samnyâsins*. Alternative titles are *parivrâjaka, bhikshu, yati,* and *shramana*. The term *samnyâsa* conveys asceticism and self-abnegation. Cognate terms are *vairâgya* and *tyâga*.

**2.** Asceticism and the life of renunciation date as far back as the (Vedic) Indus-Sarasvati civilization. Ascetic culture is an expression of India's long-held concern with spiritual ideals, and out of it grew many of the Yoga tradition's central intellectual and spiritual achievements. Buddha, Mahâvîra, Shankara—many of the great realizers whose teachings have shaped our practice and understanding of Yoga—took up the life of renunciation to explore the path of liberation and to open it up for others.

Hindu and Jaina ascetics

**3.** Renunciation, also known as *vairâgya*, is primarily an inner attitude that is a result of understanding the higher goal in life, *moksha* (liberation). A *vairâgin* or *tyâgin*—a renouncer or renunciate—is disinterested in worldly aims, as he or she deems life to be fleeting and illusory. Outwardly it can be expressed as exempting oneself from social responsibilities and material possessions in order to lead a life of simplicity. Inwardly and more importantly, renunciation is dispassion and detachment, that is, the letting go of the subtle seeds of attachment to material objects and relations. Both ideals of renunciation are to be pursued for the higher purpose of ego transcendence and liberation.

**4.** In the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, the God-man Krishna reconciles these two expressions of the ideal of renunciation. He distinguishes between Jnâna-Yoga (which he equates with Sâmkhya,


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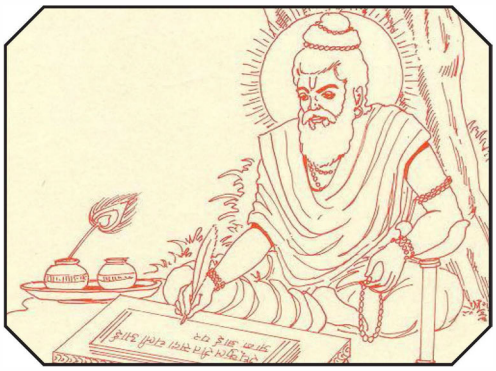
implying the renouncer's approach) and Karma-Yoga (the path of action for which Krishna uses the term *yoga*). Krishna's emphasis is on an engaged spirituality involving ego-transcending action. This is a more integral approach to spirituality, a "life-positive" form of renunciation, in contrast to the verticalist approaches.

**5.** By the time of the early *Upanishads* (Post-Vedic/Upanishadic Age 1500–1000 B.C.), the trend of world renunciation had developed significantly. Many ascetic groups at the fringes of society not only challenged the brahmanic orthodoxy to revise their social paradigm, but they contributed significantly to the evolution of yogic techniques and teachings. Even in the time of Gautama the Buddha and Mahâvîra, we find a large ascetic culture whose members (called *shramanas*) were in opposition to the brahmanical religion. The ascetic and renunciate movements impacted the social, political, and economic life of India so deeply that Hindu lawgivers were forced to address this trend. They invented the social model of the stages of life (*âshrama*).

**6.** The system of *âshramas,* or life stages, incorporated the ideal of renunciation into a social model that placed *samnyâsa* at the end of the course of an individual's development. The recommended progression was from chaste student (*brahmacarin*) to dutiful householder (*grihasthin*) to forest-dwelling ascetic (*vâna-prasthin*) to full renouncer (*samnyâsin*) Only after having been educated in spiritual matters (*brahmacarya* stage) and having experienced the world and also contributed to society (*gârhasthya* stage) could a person renounce everything (*vâna-prastha* and *samnyâsa* stages). We can trace the history of the ideal of *samnyâsa* through the various literary genres (*Upanishads,* epics, etc.). Some authorities stipulated that anyone who understood the import of the *Vedas* could abandon the sacrificial duty and qualify for the life of renunciation. Other authorities insisted that *samnyâsa* was inappropriate in this present age, known as the *kali-yuga*.

**7.** India has witnessed a long debate about which approach—that of the householder or the renouncer—is most favorable for achieving the highest spiritual realization. In the *Mahâbhârata*, for instance, Sage Kapila advocates renunciation and belittles the value of the householder life related to ritualized religion. Other sages praise the householder life, because through their very active worldly and ritual life, householders pay their debts to ancestors, deities, and fellow humans. In this way, they help maintain both the social and the cosmic order *and* qualify for achieving inner freedom. The path of Jnâna-Yoga, as well as early Buddhism and Jainism, emphasize the ideal of renunciation, whereas Bhakti-Yoga and Tantra consider them necessary but not central to spiritual



Vaishnava sage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awakening.

**8.** The *Samnyâsa-Upanishads* iterate many of the earlier deliberations about the renouncer, as well as the social and cultural implications of such a life-style. Should one pursue the renounced life after initiation? Could one pursue *samnyâsa* from any stage of life? These texts answered these and other similar questions.

**9.** Some texts distinguish between types or levels of renouncers. The *parama-hamsa* almost universally signifies the most exalted degree of freedom. *Parivrâjaka* is the term commonly used for a wandering mendicant. The *turîya-atîtas* and *avadhûtas* are thought of as Self-realized adepts at the *parama-hamsa* ("supreme swan") level. In actual fact, full Self-realization is rare, and often these ascetics seem to enjoy only lesser realizations.

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #36**

# Samnyâsa: Uncluttering Our Life

by Georg Feuerstein

In a chapter of the book *Green Dharma,* coauthored with my wife, we dwell on the overconsumption of our modern Western civilization and how we all must rediscover the traditional virtue of what Duane Elgin called "voluntary simplicity." Practically speaking, voluntary simplicity consists in salutary behavior such as:

- the intentional *reduction* of one's personal consumption of consumer items—from cars to restaurant meals and from clothing to skin care products—by learning to favor what is essential, functional, and durable;
- the conscious *selection* of products that are nonpolluting at the manufacturing stage and subsequently;
- the attitude of favoring items that are *reusable, recyclable,* and/or *repairable* and the consistent *practice* of reusing, recycling, and/or repairing;
- the habit of buying as much as possible *locally* grown food or locally produced products, which will avoid the environmental costs involved in long-distance transportation;
- the *willingness* to put up with inconvenience and even some apparent hardships


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that do, however, make one's life overall more meaningful and/or pleasant, such as switching to a simpler mode of transport (e.g., ride sharing, using public transport or a bicycle, or walking to work and back);

- *conscientious investment* of one's essential backup funds in truly environment-friendly enterprises, which requires most careful checking because regular investment channels frequently use the green label unwarrantedly;
- the *readiness* to embark on local cooperative enterprises that benefit everyone, such as periodically helping out at one's local food cooperatives, or serving on the school board or town council, which might enable one to make favorable public changes of benefit to oneself and others.

If the above-listed actions appear too demanding, we can begin by simply uncluttering our life, that is, by giving away what we haven't used in a year or two and thus really don't need. This can at times prove a a bit challenging, because it is often difficult to give away stuff we no longer need or want, not because we are still attached to those things but because others aren't interested in receiving hand-me-downs, perhaps because in the circles in which we are moving everyone feels at least some of the burden of owning too much or perhaps because people prefer new thing over old ones. That's where thrift stores come in handy.

Once we have gotten rid of unnecessary and unwanted material surplus in our life, we inspect how our behavior, rather than our belongings, is similarly cluttered. This phase of personal simplification can be called "social uncluttering." Some of our involvements seem like necessary obligations but are not really. We are just telling ourselves that we need to do such and such, perhaps because we have done so for a long time or because some of our values and social practices still lag behind our yogic insights. In the end, it is all a matter of our priorities, our value system. What do we truly treasure in order to invest our time and energy in it?

Unlike our material uncluttering, which primarily affects us personally, our social uncluttering can lead to a certain amount of displeasure in others. We should therefore be as skillful as possible in disentangling ourselves from unnecessary social involvements, especially if they are long standing. We also should not mind when our actions cause former friends and associates to think of us as cooks. We must be willing to pay the prize for integrity, for living by our deepest convictions.

A third level of simplification consists in uncluttering our conceptual furniture. Our thoughts, as we all know from personal experience, can have a negative impact on our inner environment and thus also negatively affect our external environment.

Uncluttering is renunciation. Renunciation, letting-go, is simple in principle but challenging in practice. Yet, renunciation is the big lesson we will all have to learn certainly at the time of death. Why wait until then? Why not consciously prepare for the moment when everything will be ripped away from us? Voluntary simplicity makes implicit sense and is at the core of all yogic approaches.


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# FOR REFLECTION

**1.** Do you feel it is possible to achieve liberation, or enlightenment, while living in the world? Conversely, what value do you place on the ideal of renunciation? Do you feel that monasticism or ascetic culture is valuable, practical, or even possible in our modern Western context?

**2.** What do you think of periods of formal retreat as a means of including the ideal of renunciation in our otherwise busy lives? Would you say that it is possible to regard our daily activities and responsibilities as a form of spiritual engagement?

**3.** Do you think that a person's commitment to spirituality and moral standards is relevant to the rest of society? If so, how would you consider supporting such an approach? In your view, to what degree should the ideal of liberation figure in our society?

**4.** In Vidyâranya's *Jîvan-Mukti-Viveka*, those who have achieved awakening are said to be beyond all socially ordained duties. The *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* puts forward a similar view, but encourages even those who are enlightened to continue to work within the world in order to support progressive change. Other authorities stress a socially engaged spirituality, suggesting that the greater one's inner freedom is, the more one's contribution to the world is needed. What is your own opinion?

**5.** The image we have of the Hindu deity Shiva from certain sources is that of an unpredictable and unconventional ascetic. A famous narrative discusses how Shiva entered a certain forest and seduced the wives of hermits and ascetics who had retired there to perform penance and religious activities. Shiva enacted this pastime to flaunt the ascetics and introduce an element of chaos into their otherwise orderly existence. Apparently their austerities were in vain or insincere and the wild, ascetic god was revealing to them their attachment to basic comforts, which they maintained while outwardly appearing renounced. A lesson being taught here and in other such myth cycles is that the freedom to be attained must be absolute and is beyond any relative show of renunciation. How do you relate to such an ideal, which demolishes all conventionality? How conventional are you? Do you think that conventionality can be a self-protective mechanism? What other ingredients does a conventional approach to life have?

**6.** Humility is an obvious sign of renunciation, as renunciation involves detachment from


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FOR REFLECTION ctd.

ego-aggrandizement. Once, a *sâdhu* came with his disciples to a temple to take *darshana* of the deity in the form of the sculpture standing on the altar. A local businessman pushed his way through the crowd and came before the deity and prayed, "I am a sinner. Please have mercy on me. Extend your grace to this fallen, worthless soul." The *sâdhu* felt his plea was insincere and merely a meaningless show of piety. He called out to the gentleman, "Hey! You, Mr. Sinner! Come over here, you sinful wretch." Surprised, the individual turned to the teacher and responded, "Are you calling me a sinful wretch? Who do you think you are? What kind of holy man are you to behave in such an incorrigible manner? You're a conman! A hypocrite!" The monk simply smiled. It dawned on the businessman that behind the *sâdhu's* abrasive words might lay a great truth. Hopefully the self-declared sinner became a little more humble and sincere. How attached are you to your self-image? Do you at least sometimes see and understand the *sâdhu's* smile?

**7.** It is important to distinguish the masculine psychological tendency of escaping or avoiding relationship and the true spirit of renunciation. The other pole in our human nature is the feminine tendency to embrace and pursue relationship, which is tied in with world-affirmation and social involvement. In our dealings with others we might see one or the other tendency at play. Thus we might be social or withdrawn, "antisocial." What is true in your own case?

**8.** On a more basic level, our dualistic mind performs on the basis of avoiding pain and courting pleasure. This natural differentiation causes attachment (*râga*) and aversion (*dvesha*) in us. We must make sure that our so-called spirit of renunciation is not generated by a feeling of aversion. True renunciation is born of wisdom and a natural attraction to a higher Reality. We may decide to enter a retreat merely out of distaste with our personal or social life, just as we are apt to avoid cultivating friendships or relationships after experiencing bitter disappointments. Ultimately, decisions made unconsciously only perpetuate our karmic patterns. Apply these insights to your own life experience and take stock of your emotional reactivity in the presence of discomfort and pain.

**9.** Ultimately, complete renunciation amounts to complete trust (*vishvâsa*) in the larger Life, or higher Reality. When we are feeling connected with our deeper nature, or true identity, we do not need anything outside of ourselves. An extreme example of this fundamental trust, or faith (*shraddhâ*), is an ascetic's traditional vow to retreat to the forest and not take any nourishment unless it presents itself naturally. Just as a python waits in the trees for an animal to come by, so the renouncer of this type will not move from his or her spot and simply fast until providence delivers food and drink. To what degree do you trust life? How much time do you spend planning and worrying about your future?


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Garlanded ascetic


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# QUESTIONNAIRE #8

Please SUBMIT this questionnaire to TYS: tyslearning@sasktel.net
Don't forget to include your full name, email address, date, and course title. Please refer to our instructions on p. 17.

**1. Can Yoga be said to be an invention of Hinduism?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) this is incorrect
(b) Yoga originated prior to the emergence of Hinduism
(c) Yoga is not related to HInduism

**2. How are *tapas* and *samnyâsa* related to Yoga?** *(Check one)*

(a) they are entirely unrelated to Yoga
(b) only *samnyâsa* can be said to be related to Yoga while *tapas* is simply an older name for what came to be called *Yoga*
(c) they are an inalienable part of Yoga
(d) they are related to Yoga but in a more coincidental manner

**3. Historically, which of the following is correct?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) Yoga is older than Hinduism
(b) Hinduism grew out of the Vedic culture
(c) Yoga is Vedic, not Hindu
(d) Yoga has Vedic roots
(e) Hinduism has Vedic roots
(f) Yoga is Hindu, not Vedic

**4. Which of the following belong to the four traditional "goals" of Hinduism?** *(Check one*)

(a) wealth
(b) morality
(c) social welfare
(d) observation of the caste system
(e) sensual pleasure
(f) spiritual liberation
(g) political liberty
(h) nonharming


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**5. In which historical era of India's civilization did sacrificial mysticism particularly flourish?** *(Check one)*

(a) the Vedic age
(b) the Brahmanical age
(c) the Upanishadic age
(d) the Tantric/Purânic age
(e) the sectarian age
(f) the Victorian age in India

**6. In which of the following types of scripture is *tapas prominent*?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) *Vedas*
(b) *Brâhmanas*
(c) *Âranyakas*
(d) *Upanishads*
(e) the epics (*Mahâbhârata* and *Râmâyana*)
(f) *Purânas*
(g) *Âgamas*
(h) *Tantras*

**7. Who is traditionally regarded as the first teacher of Yoga?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) Vyâsa
(b) Rishi Vishvamitra
(c) Hiranyagarbha
(d) the Sun
(e) the Moon
(f) Patanjali

**8. According to the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, how many types of *tapas* are there?** *(Check one)*

(a) two
(b) three
(c) four
(d) numerous

**9. Did the Buddha practice *tapas*?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) never, he recommended the Middle Way
(c) he practiced extreme *tapas* to attain *nirvâna*
(d) he at first practiced extreme *tapas* and then switched to a more moderate type of *tapas*


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**10. Who or what is a *shramana*?** *(Check one)*

(a) a practitioner of asceticism
(b) a member of the priestly estate
(c) a brahmanical renouncer
(d) a nonorthodox renouncer
(e) a Vedic priest
(f) a member of one of the four social estates of Hinduism

**11. What is a *grihasthin*?** *(Check one)*

(a) a Buddhist renouncer
(b) a Hindu renouncer
(c) a Hindu practitioner of *tapas*
(d) a Hindu householder
(e) a member of Jainism

**12. Traditionally, what social duties do those Hindu renouncers have to perform who have reached Self-realization?** *(Check one)*

(a) whatever duties are incumbent on them as citizens of a country
(b) the social duties laid out in the traditional legal literature, such as the *Manu-Smriti*
(c) at least theoretically, none at all


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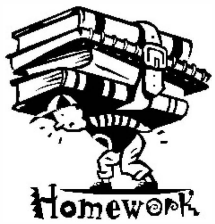
# LESSON 9

## I. Objectives

This lesson has the following two objectives:

- to help understand India's traditional philosophical systems (*darshana*)
- to explain the nature of philosophy (other than academic philosophy)

## II. Homework Assignments




- **Read** section IV of Chapter 3 in *The Yoga Tradition* book (pp. 72–78)
- **Read** all materials of Lesson 9 in this Study Guide, including Additional Study Materials #37–38 and the Additional Source Reading.
- **Ponder** the questions under "For Reflection" and jot down your significant thoughts.
- **Answer Questionnaire #9 and submit.**
- **Practical Assignment:** While working on this lesson, try to accustom yourself to observing your daily behavior in terms of the witnessing awareness (*cit, purusha*) of the Vedânta and Sâmkhya systems. Anything that occurs—whether within yourself or outside—is necessarily a manifestation of Nature, or Cosmic Reality (*prakriti*). At the same time your mind has the remarkable capacity of "watching," or witnessing, all that is happening. According to the nondualistic system of Vedânta, this feature suggests the perfect omniscience of the ever-present transcendental Self (*âtman*). According to the dualistic system of Sâmkhya, the same feature is a sign that the most subtle aspect of the mind, which is called *buddhi*, is so translucent that it reflects the "light," or omniscience, of the transcendental Self (here called *purusha*). Whether you adopt (at least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for the sake of this exercise) the Vedânta or the Sâmkhya system, *in practice* you are still dealing with the same wonderful ability of the mind to stand back from everything and simply witness all events. In Buddhism, this practice is known as mindfulness. So, try to be mindful of what is occurring inside of your mind, in your body, and in your external environment. In particular, witness your emotions. It is important not to become awkwardly self conscious or guilt ridden. This is not an easy exercise, but one that is incredibly transformative when done correctly and consistently.

## III. Introductory Remarks

Some people are more philosophically inclined; they like to think about the how and why of things. Others are more practically inclined, and they seldom pause to ask the Big Questions. We assume that anyone who has signed up for this course belongs most likely to the former group or, at least, wants to give philosophical thinking a good shot.

Since Yoga does not merely include postural exercises but, as we have made clear from the beginning, all sorts of other practices, including study, it should not come as a surprise that it achieved status also as a philosophical system (*darshana*) within Hinduism. Because of its close association with Sâmkhya philosophy, Yoga has often been confused with Sâmkhya. But it actually is considered a philosophical system of its own, and as such generally refers to the school of Classical Yoga, as formulated by Patanjali and the classical Sanskrit commentators on his system (notably Vyâsa, Vâcaspati Mishra, and Vijnâna Bhikshu). This school is dealt with in detail in our 250-hour distance-learning course entitled ***Classical Yoga.*** It is also discussed, more briefly, in *The Yoga Tradition* (Chapter 10; pp. 239–254).


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# IV. Yoga and Hindu Philosophy
## (YT, pp. 72-78)

## Preamble

The traditional concept of six orthodox systems (*shad-darshana*) of Hindu philosophy is hardly representative of the wide range of philosophical activity in India. There are numerous other traditional schools of thought that, to varying degrees, base themselves on the Vedic revelation. Then there are many more that pay mere lip service to the *Vedas* but really represent independent developments, as is the case with some of the schools of Tantra. Even the inclusion of the Sâmkhya tradition into the scheme of the six orthodox systems is questionable. Certainly the classical formulation of Sâmkhya, as found in the *Sâmkhya-Kârikâ,* makes no mention of the *Vedas* or an ultimate Reality (*brahman*) that is the transcendental foundation of Spirit (*purusha*) and Cosmos (*prakriti*). If orthodoxy (*âstikya*) means reliance on the Vedic revelation, then Classical Sâmkhya fails to qualify, at least according to the *Brahma-Sûtra* (2.1.10-11; 2.2.37ff), which purports to be the authoritative voice for the Vedic orthodoxy. While the *Sâmkhya-Kârikâ* says nothing about the Vedic revelation or the belief in a supreme Being, the later *Sâmkhya-Sûtra* (1.92-94) explicitly affirms atheism.

In the fourteenth century, the Vaishnava scholar Mâdhava compiled the *Sarva-Darshana-Samgraha* in which he elaborated on the prominent philosophical schools of his day. He actually reviewed not six but sixteen systems: Materialism (Cârvâka), Buddhism, Jainism, Râmânuja's Vedânta, Ânanda Tîrtha's Pûrna-Prajnâ Vedânta, the Nakulîsha-Pâshupata system, Shaivism, the Pratyabhijnâ system, Alchemy (Raseshvara), Vaisheshika, Nyâya, Jaimini's Vedânta, Pânini's philosophy of grammar, Sâmkhya, Patanjali's Yoga, and Shankara's Vedânta (in this order). The scope of Mâdhava's work demonstrates the diversity of philosophical thought in medieval India.

Sage Bharadvaja
(There have been several sages with this name.)

For this section, we advise you to procure a copy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Moore's readily available and relatively inexpensive *Source Book in Indian Philosophy,* though this book is *not* a prescribed text.


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## Main Points

**1.** The *Vedas* are the source of sacred and also secular thought within traditional Hindu culture. The six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy are called *âstika* (orthodox), because they accept the validity of the *Vedas*, their common heritage. Please refer to the chronology in the back of *The Yoga Tradition* (pp. 445–460) to get a sense for the historical unfolding of these teachings.

**2.** Philosophy, religion, and spirituality are closely related in Hinduism (as well as Buddhism and Jainism). Traditionally, the Hindus do not speak of "Hinduism" but use the term *sanâtana-dharma*, or eternal law, instead. This is roughly equivalent to the notion of *philosophia perennis,* which is a broad and universal term that conveys the spirit of freedom beyond dogmas and sectarianism. *Sanâtana-dharma* implies that there is a universal or common ground where religion, spirituality, and philosophy meet.

**3.** In the context of Hinduism, philosophy is not merely abstract or theoretical thought; rather it is, as in ancient Greece, "love of wisdom" (*philosophía*), which is always life enhancing. This sense is captured well in the term *darshana*, meaning "view" or "vision," and standing for philosophical insight into existence. When such insight becomes established as a philosophical model, or a line of thought, it is called *mata*. *Mata* is also often used to denote the way of life one follows in pursuit of a certain ideal or along the lines of a certain worldview. One such *darshana,* or philosophical viewpoint, is Patanjali's Classical Yoga, which is also known as *yoga-darshana*.

**4.** It is all important to realize that philosophical systems are *models* of reality. They must not be confused with reality itself.

**5.** Hindu philosophy is not naïve philosophizing, as some Western critics have contended. It is self-critical and comprehensive. It can be usefully approached via the common categories of Western philosophy: ontology, epistemology, logic, ethics, and aesthetics. Epistemology, especially, is a very important

### True Philosophy

Philosophy is one of life's noblest pursuits; although its wisdom is the reward of few, it ought to be the aspiration of all. If a philosophy is going to satisfy the intellectual life of the modern world, its conclusions must be able to withstand the acid test of analysis in the dry light of reason. Nothing can be taken for granted; the necessity of every assumption must be established. It must be capable of explaining all things from the Great Absolute to a blade of grass; it must not contradict the facts of experience, conceptual or perceptual. Its hypothesis must satisfy all the demands of our nature; it must account for all types of experience: waking, dreaming, sleeping, and those moments which are claimed by the religious ascetic during his deep contemplation . . .

According to Indian tradition there is only one Ultimate Reality, but there are [at least] six fundamental interpretations of that Reality. These are called Shad Darshanas, or "six insights," because they give man sight of the sensible verities and enable him to understand in the light of reason the supersensible Truth attainable only through the revealed scriptures or through the experience of rishis (sages).

**—Theos Bernard**
*Hindu Philosophy,* pp. 3-4


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subject in all yogic teachings, because it pinpoints the fundamental flaws in our way of understanding and perceiving the world. The Greek word *episteme* means "knowledge," and epistemology deals with the sources or instruments of knowledge, such as perception, inference, valid testimony, etc.

**6.** Because Hindu philosophy is directly concerned with spiritual matters—specifically liberation—it is also known as *âtma-vidyâ* ("science of the Self") or *adhyâtmika-vidyâ* ("spiritual science").

**7.** In *The Yoga Tradition* and in this Study Guide, we will focus mainly on the classical formulations of the *shad-darshanas,* or six orthodox systems of Hindu thought. These schools and their teachings arose gradually and in dialogue with each other over a long period of time. The diversity and also the high quality of their philosophical thought bespeaks the intensity with which India's civilization has investigated the fundamental questions of Who am I? Whence am I? What must I do?

**8.** The six philosophical systems of Hindu thought are: Pûrva-Mîmâmsâ, Uttara-Mîmâmsâ (i.e., Vedânta), Sâmkhya, Yoga, Nyâya, and Vaisheshika. For easy memorization, you can think of them respectively as philosophical ritualism, philosophical mysticism, ontologism (to coin a phrase), Yoga philosophy, logism, and distinctionism (Vaisheshika from *vishesha,* "distinct" or "particular").

> The great philosophies of the past arose from within remarkable human beings who could give voice to the ideas necessary for moral development, ideas that could guide men toward discovering for themselves the whole truth about both the inner and outer condition of human life on earth. The origin of real philosophy is not the intellectual imitation of external reality, but the outer expression of truths about an invisible world perceived through what the traditions call "the eye of the heart." Great philosophy—that is, great guidance for man—comes, let us be blunt about it, from men of greater being.
>
> **—Jakob Needleman**
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The following materials (starting with the essay on Pûrva-Mîmâmsâ), which were authored conjointly by Jagadish Dasa and Georg Feuerstein, complement and amplify those furnished in *The Yoga Tradition.*


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## FOR REFLECTION

**1.** Many do not see the value of philosophy or of living a philosophical life. What is your particular take on this subject? Socrates made the statement, "A life not examined is a life not worth living." A basic concern of philosophy is to make sense of events and situations that occur in our daily life. It involves asking questions and trying to understand all of the trivialities as well as perplexing situations that we are confronted with in light of an overall outlook on life. An ethical perspective and a mode of living should naturally proceed from our personal understanding of the world and the laws that govern our worldly existence.

**2.** If you could travel back in time, with which philosophical genius would you want to have a conversation?

**3.** Are you fond of explaining things or do you tend to take things at their face value? Would you describe yourself as a philosophical person? Does this trait interfere with the practical side of life? Or are you so practical that you have little time for pondering things? (Not likely in the case of our course participants but always possible.)

**4.** Jot down your ideas about the three major philosophical/theological categories of God, the ultimate nature of the self, and the nature of the world. Then, explain your understanding of the interconnections between these three. Finally, explain what you believe to be the ultimate purpose of human life and the means to achieve it.

## REMEMBER

As we noted before, we recommend that you write your responses to "For Reflection" and also to the homework questions in your notebook. Many students have found this very helpful in assimilating yogic ideas and making them relevant to their daily life and spiritual practice.


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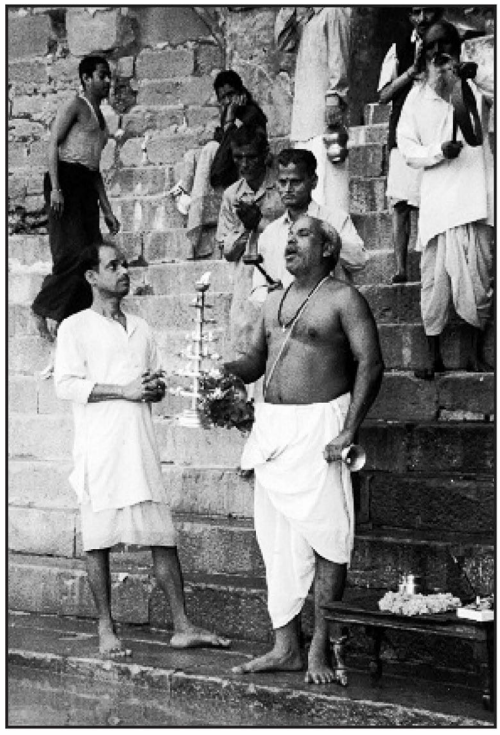
## Pûrva-Mîmâmsâ
**(YT, pp. 73-74)**

Pûrva-Mîmâmsâ ("Earlier Inquiry") systematically interprets the ritual part (*karma-kânda*) of the Vedic revelation. Jaimini, the founder of this tradition, wrote the *Mîmâmsâ-Sûtra,* which contains the theoretical basis of this school of philosophy. The principal commentators were Shabara (c. 400 A.D.), Prabhâkara (7th cent. A.D.), and Kumârila Bhatta (8th cent. A.D.).

Pûrva-Mîmâmsâ is concerned with action, notably right action, as we can never be inactive, and our actions have definite consequences. Action has an external and an inner (karmic) effect. Hence it is important that we know how to act in order to avoid reaping undesirable consequences. Contemplation alone cannot free us from the shadow of wrong activity. We also must live a morally sound life.

This system teaches that the injunctions of the *Vedas,* if heeded, will lead to inner freedom. Reliance on the revealed knowledge—the eternal Word (*shabda*)—of the *Vedas* alone can give us knowledge of *dharma,* the moral order.



Offering ritual at river

We have free will at the level of the *âtman*—or individual spiritual Self—which is beyond space and time (eternal). This transcendental Self is in fact the "enjoyer" (*bhoktri*) of all actions, while the body is the platform for enjoyment (*bhoga-âyatana*), the senses are the instruments of enjoyment (*bhoga-sâdhana*), and external objects and inner feelings are the objects of enjoyment (*bhoga-vishaya*). Here "enjoyment" means simply "experience."

Curiously, this system maintains that the numerous *âtmans* are all unconscious (*jada*). Upon liberation, when all *karma* is exhausted, the Self abides without body and mind in an eternal state of *unconsciousness*—hardly an attractive philosophical notion. In view of this multiplicity of *âtmans,* we can call Mîmâmsâ a transcendental pluralism. This Self is affected by the consequences of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its actions, both auspicious and inauspicious. Upon liberation, the Self persists as pure substance without qualities. Prior to liberation, it is connected with various qualities of body and mind, as well as various levels of consciousness.

A swami making a ritual offering

If liberation is not a comprehensible goal, then we are left with shaping our destiny through ethical action (*karma*) in accordance with the cosmic law (*niyati*), which is to say we are bound by fate or providence. *Apûrva*, the consequences or merit accrued by our actions, perpetuates the order of the world and human circumstance. That is why, according to *mîmâmsâkas,* it is so important to engage in morally sound actions, with rituals being the best kind of action.

Moral action repays the three kinds of debt (*rina*) that every householder must honor:

- debts to the forefathers, which are repaid by marrying and having offspring
- debts to the teachers, which are repaid by ensuring the continuation of one's tradition by educating the next generation
- debts to the deities, which are repaid by performing sacrificial rites

God had no place in the early thought of the *mîmâmsâkas*. For them, the *Vedas* were not revealed by a personal deity; nor did they assume that the world was directed by such a personal force. The fortuitous result of performing works and sacrifice according to the injunctions of the *Vedas* was said to be heaven (*svarga*), a paradisiacal abode or an exalted status among the deities. Later Mîmâmsâ theory, however, posited the notion of a personal God and made action a means of salvation.

Kumârila Bhatta and Prabhâkara, however, taught that by observing the duties prescribed in the *Vedas*, the Self becomes freed from the body—a notion similar to that of disembodied liberation (*videha-mukti*) in other systems. Because of the overt emphasis on action enjoined by the *Vedas*, yogic techniques have no place in Pûrva-Mîmâmsâ.

The primary significance of the study of Pûrva-Mîmâmsâ for students of Yoga is this system's relationship to later ethical teachings. The doctrine of *dharma* in Pûrva-Mîmâmsâ, as it was further developed in the *Dharma-Shâstras* (works on ethical and legal codes) and as recorded in the two great epics of India (see YT, pp. 183-209), has had a profound impact on the teachings of Hindu Yoga. The Hindu cultural complex out of which Yoga emerged was made cohesive through this doctrine of *dharma*, which is reflected in the system of *varnas* (social estates) and *âshramas* (stages of life). This social model provided a practical framework for the pursuit of the four recognized goals of human life called *purusha-arthas*. The theme of social responsibility is developed in the path of works, or Karma-Yoga*,* which we discussed in Lesson 6 of this Study Guide.


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*Darshana* means more than "view, viewpoint, system." It signifies a complete vision of reality, which is anchored not merely in logic but also—especially in the case of Yoga—in lived experience. As is clear from the concept of *yogi-pratyaksha* or "the perception of a yogin," lived experience includes the insights gained through meditation and the various ecstatic states (*samâdhi*).


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# FOR REFLECTION

**1.** The idea of living a virtuous or morally sound life is acceptable to everyone, even those who might not be concerned with spiritual practice. To abide by the laws of Nature and the cosmic order in general helps us maintain physical and psychological well-being, as well as foster social and political harmony. Therefore, ethics is a valid foundation for secular *and* spiritual life. Consider the kind of society we would have if the five fundamental virtues of *yama* (the first limb of Patanjali's eightfold path) were declared null and void.

**2.** Many agree with the highly pragmatic and this-worldly orientation of the early Mîmâmsâ teaching. Indeed, if the world only perpetually recycles itself and we remain involved in this world process, then there is no need to look above and beyond our present realm of experience. Rather, being well informed about the laws of consequence and practicing skillful action, the best route would be to contribute to the situation at hand. How has your personal morality shaped your life experience?

**3.** What are your ideas about the concept of revelation? Is there eternal knowledge of the universe that shines forth like the sun, having the ability to reveal itself, as in the case of *shruti* in the orthodox traditions of Hinduism? Is a personal deity or God at the source of revelation, as in the Western theistic traditions or as found in certain Hindu traditions? Is truth self-revealing? Must revelation always present itself through sound (*shabda*), or is the deepest revelation silent?

**4.** *Mîmâmsâ* represents one basic and important approach to life: We have to endeavor to engender the causes and conditions that will help us attain our highest goal. The *mîmâmsâkas* uphold what we call this-worldly values. For example, the Hindu socioreligious tradition maintains a vision of upward mobility through certain castes and life stages through proper work. If you perform your duties, your status will gradually be raised, either in the present life or a series of future lives. This notion stems from the basic understanding of Vedic *karmas,* or actions, in accord with Vedic injunctions—the prerogative of the *mîmâmsâkas*. In essence, a this-worldly orientation implies that we are proactive in life. We take the initiative rather than wait passively for events to happen to us. The negative form of this attitude is embodied in the "go-getter," who merely pursues conventional goals. The positive expression, by contrast, is that of the *sâdhaka,* who conditions his or her mind in a beneficial way and at the same time contributes to the welfare of others. The *mîmâmsâkas,* who espouse a form of traditional activism, have no time for the passive renouncer, who merely accepts things as they come.


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## Uttara-Mîmâmsâ (Vedânta = Jnâna-Yoga)

**(YT, pp. 74-75)**

Uttara-Mîmâmsâ ("Later Inquiry"), also known as Vedânta, focuses on the *jnâna-kânda* ("knowledge part") of the *Vedas,* as embodied in the teachings of the *Âranyakas* and *Upanishads*.

The primary source texts of the Vedânta tradition are the early *Upanishads,* the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, and the *Brahma-Sûtra* (c. 200 A.D.). These are collectively known as the *prasthâna-traya,* or threefold authoritative scriptural basis for the study of Vedânta. The *Upanishads* are dealt with in *The Yoga Tradition* on pp. 125–137, and the *Gîtâ* on pp. 187–196. The *Brahma-Sûtra* was composed c. 200–300 A.D. by Sage Bâdarâyana (traditionally identified with Vyâsa) and comprises a total of 555 aphorisms distributed over four chapters. Some scholars opt for an earlier date, which is always possible.

The express purpose of the *Brahma-Sûtra* is revealed in its opening aphorism *athâtho brahma jijnâsâ*—"Now [begins] the inquiry into the Absolute." The *Sûtra* was composed to capture the essential meaning of the *Upanishads*. Because the *Upanishads* cover various philosophical positions, Bâdarâyana attempted to synthesize these teachings, thereby continuing the tradition of original inquiry. His succinct comments extend to the nature of the ultimate Reality, the world, the embodied self, and the means of liberation.

Any Vedânta master wishing to establish himself as an authority was expected to compose commentaries on the *prasthâna-traya*. Thus we have Sanskrit commentaries by the following teachers (among others):

| Authority | Philosophical System |
|---|---|
| Shankara (788–820 A.D.) | Kevala-Advaita |
| Bhâskara (996–1061 A.D.) | Bheda-Abheda |
| Yâdava Prakâsha (c. 1000 A.D.) | Bheda-Abheda |
| Râmânuja (1017–1127 A.D.) | Vishishta-Advaita |
| Madhva (1197–1273 A.D.) | Dvaita |
| Shrîkantha (12th to 13th cent. A.D.) | Shaiva-Vishishta-Advaita |
| Nimbârka (second half of 13th cent. A.D.) | Dvaita |
| Shrîpati (second half of 14th cent. A.D.) | Bheda-Abheda-Âtmaka-Vishishta-Advaita |


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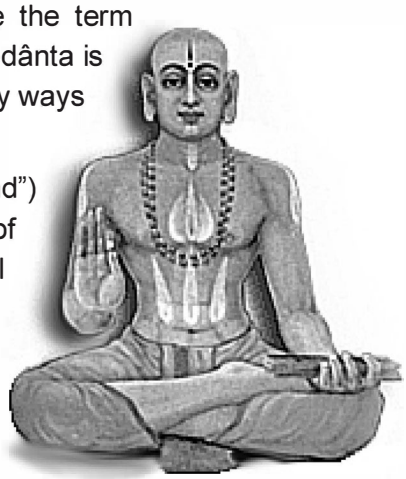
| | |
|---|---|
| Vallabha (1479–1544 A.D.) | Shuddha-Advaita |
| Shuka (c. 1550 A.D.) | Bheda-Vâda |
| Vijnâna Bhikshu (early 17th cent. A.D.) | Âtma-Brahma-Aikya-Bheda-Vâda |
| Baladeva (early 18th cent. A.D.) | Acintya-Bheda-Abheda |

The commentary by Bodhâyana has been lost. The same holds true of Vallabha's larger commentary on the *Brahma-Sûtra;* only his short *Anu-Bhâshya* has survived.

Each of the above authorities has formulated a distinct system. In some cases, the doctrinal differences between one system and another may strike us as insignificant.

Historically the two most influential Vedânta authorities are Shankara and Râmânuja. Their learned commentaries on the obscure aphorisms of the *Brahma-Sûtra* and on other works have sparked lively debate and even controversy over the centuries.

Vedânta is the most important living tradition of Indian philosophy or theology. It is the systematic inquiry into the nature of the Absolute. We will use the term Vedantists for those who follow the school of Uttara-Mîmâmsâ. Vedânta is also considered the completion of the Vedic revelation and in many ways rests on the knowledge of the Pûrva-Mîmâmsâ.



Madhva

The word *vedânta* (from *veda* or "knowledge" and *anta* or "end") also suggests a culmination of the Vedic teachings. The purpose of Vedânta is to provide a critical analysis and exposition of the spiritual essence of the *Vedas.* It is considered the mature fruit and conclusion (*siddhânta*) of the *Vedas*, the ultimate vision to be cultivated through consciously directed practice. Vedânta is essentially a yogic way of life, emphasizing practices and techniques that serve the goal of achieving understanding and ultimately *realizing* Reality directly.

Chapters 11 and 12 of *The Yoga Tradition* book, which focus on the nondualistic teachings of the Shaiva and Vaishnava communities, afford us an opportunity to examine more deeply the Vedântic ideas of schools that still enjoy large followings today. Undoubtedly, Vedânta has had the most far-reaching impact on popular Hindu religion and spiritual philosophy.

In ancient India, Sâmkhya was the dominant tradition in metaphysical thinking, but gradually this system was overtaken by Vedânta, which, in its many interpretations, offered perhaps more satisfying philosophical answers.

The hallmark of Vedânta is nondualism, which exists in various forms: Ultimately, Reality is singular; just as in the Judeo-Christian religion and Islam, God is said to be one only. Often Westerners equate nondualism with the philosophy of Shankara, but there are many other schools that have far more numerous followings. Vedânta is a highly diversified tradition (see YT, pp. 74-75), which includes the following two major branches: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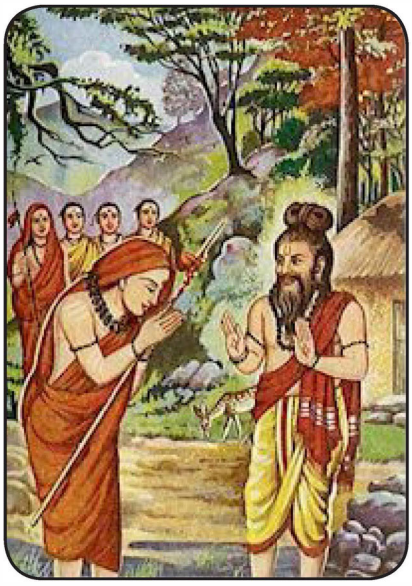
- Kevala-Advaita (Absolute Nondualism) of Shankara
- Vishishta-Advaita (Qualified Nondualism) of Râmânuja

To these we must add the dualistic (*dvaita*) Vedânta of Madhva, who vigorously contested the nondualistic schools in favor of theism. Madhva's dualism, however, is not the type of dualism found in some Western philosophical traditions, nor is it dualistic to the degree of certain Sâmkhya or Yoga schools. As we will see in later chapters, his metaphysical explanations merely emphasize basic distinctions between ontological categories—such as God and man, God and world, etc.—but are not meant to absolutely segregate all aspects of reality from each other. His philosophical move is to show how all created things rest or are dependent on the One.

These three branches of Vedânta acquired the largest followings and possess a vast commentarial literature.

**Shankara**



Shankara greeting Vyâsa

Shankara, who belongs to the seventh or eighth century A.D., propounded a strictly nondualistic teaching, which was directly opposed to the dualism posited in Classical Yoga and Classical Sâmkhya. Shankara, whose viewpoint is considered by some to be an extremist interpretation of the message of the *Upanishads*, opposed both Buddhism and the narrow ritualism of Mîmâmsâ. In many ways, however, his philosophy resembles Mahâyâna Buddhist teachings. Yet there is no doubt that one of his goals was to reestablish the authority of the *Vedas,* which is rejected by Buddhism and Jainism.

Shankara's philosophy informs the path of Jnâna-Yoga. It emphasizes the ideal of discerning the Real (*sat*) from the unreal (*asat*), the renunciation of the fruit of one's actions, the cultivation of virtuous mental qualities and behavior, and the desire for liberation. The following four *mahâ-vâkyas*, or authoritative sayings, are the mantric foundation of Shankara's method of discernment:

- "I am Brahman" (*aham brahma asmi*)
- "Thou art That" (*tat tvam asi*)
- "The Self is the Absolute" (*ayam âtma brahma*)
- "All this is verily the Absolute" (*sarvam khalv idam brahma*)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For Shankara, the ultimate singular Reality appears to be manifold only as a result of our innate ignorance (*avidyâ*). The world of appearances, as it presents itself to our senses and mind, is merely an outgrowth of this ignorance, or what he calls a distortion (*vivarta*) of Reality. The world and its phenomena are like an imaginary snake that is in reality a rope. In the *Viveka-Cûdâmani* (228-230), which is wrongly ascribed to Shankara, we can read:

> A pot, though a modification of clay, is not different [from it]; because [the pot] is everywhere essentially clay . . . [Similarly], the whole [world], as a modification of the real *brahman,* is but that real [*brahman*] . . .
>
> —*Viveka-Cûdâmani*, 228-230

The world is not nonexistent (a widespread mistaken interpretation of Shankara), but *unreal*. In light of this idea, it is difficult to imagine that any action can be anything but futile. Shankara does indeed emphasize that action (*karman*) cannot destroy ignorance. Only the fire of gnosis (*jnâna*) can burn ignorance to ashes and emancipate a person from his or her self-imposed bondage.

### Râmânuja and Madhva

Râmânuja and, as you can see in Chapter 12 of *The Yoga Tradition*, also Madhva perceived Reality quite differently from Shankara (and from each other). If Shankara was *the* spokesman for Jnâna-Yoga, Ramanuja and Madhva were strong advocates of Bhakti-Yoga and maintained that the proper understanding of the Vedântic literature required a personal God at the heart of existence. Both teachers wrote seminal commentaries on the *Gîtâ* and *Vedânta-Sûtra* to support their respective positions, giving rise

Shankara blessing Hastamalaka

The brahmin Prabhâkara had a son who was mute and appeared to be an idiot. When Shankara saw the boy one day, he knew immediately that the child was special. He asked the boy directly: "Who are you, my child?" He replied: "I am the eternal self and not dead matter." The master felt happy and took him on as a disciple. Henceforth the boy was known as Hastamalaka, "he who has." Along with Padmapâda, Sureshvara, and Trotaka, he achieved renown as one of Shankara's four principal disciples.


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to a large secondary literature. Their writings are more theological than philosophical and can be compared to the treatises of the learned exegetists of medieval Christianity.

## FURTHER READING

The literature on Vedânta is vast, and the following selection is little more than a start in the right direction. See also the subsequent bibliographies on the *Upanishads, Yoga-Vâsishtha,* Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Jnâna-Yoga.

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A survey of India's philosophy, however cursory, will show that in spite of occasional lapses into inconsequential dialectic subtleties, the constant aim has been to interpret life in the concrete and to find basic means for the deliverance of man from the ills of life. This deliverance lies in the realization of the spiritual nature of man and the unity of all life.

**—Krishna Saksena**

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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #37**

## Reflections on the One

(Adapted from Georg Feuerstein's
*Introduction to the Bhagavad-Gîtâ*)

Shankara is the embodiment of the continuous readiness of the Indian mind to renounce the Many in favor of the One. As such he symbolizes the exact antithesis to Krishna, the propounder of the sublime philosophy of the *Gîtâ*, whose doctrine is one of life- and world-affirmation. These two disparate attitudes are the propelling forces underlying the prolific unfoldment of Indian thought and life. When viewed from this bipolarity, the intricate pattern of Indian philosophical and religious growth begins to be more intelligible and deeply instructive. Mere philosophical denial of the reality of the world does not change its practical actuality impinging on everyday life. This is best illustrated in an anecdote told about Shankara himself:

> A king, to whom Shankara had expounded his doctrine of the unreality of the phenomenal universe, was curious to ascertain to what degree this teaching was rooted in Shankara's own mind. Hence, when Shankara next asked for an audience with the king, the monarch ordered a mad elephant to be released. As the philosopher saw the animal charging at him, he began to run as fast as his legs would bear him, and he would not stop until he had found a safe place. Panting for


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breath and perspiring, but mentally serene, Shankara appeared before the king, who reproached him for having run away from what he should have recognized as a mere illusion. Shankara's reply is characteristic: "In truth, neither the elephant is real, nor you, nor I. It was merely an illusion of yours that you saw me escape from the elephant."

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #38**

# The Life of Shankara

by Georg Feuerstein

Shankara Âcârya (Shankarâcârya), as tradition recollects, was born into a Nambudiri brahmin family in Kaladi, a village located at the banks of the Cûrnâ River in Kerala. The exact year of his birth is unknown, and Indian pundits and Western scholars offer vastly diverging dates. Thus according to T. S. Narayana Sastri, Shankara was born in 509 B.C. and died in 477 B.C., whereas the consensus of scholarly opinion favors 788–820 A.D.—a gap of nearly 1,300 years! It appears that the latter dates are due to a confusion of Shankara with his namesake Abhinava Shankara, who was the spiritual head of the Shankara *matha* at Kanchipuram. Increasingly, Western scholars place Âdi Shankara (the original Shankara) into the beginning or middle of the seventh century A.D., that is, 100–150 years earlier than generally assumed.

Young Shankara greeting his teacher Govinda

Shankara's parents were Shivaguru, a studious and pious man who died when Shankara was only three years old, and Âryâmbâ, a loving mother. Because the couple remained childless for a long time, they decided to go on a pilgrimage to Vrishacala (modern Trichur). There they engaged in much devotional activity, and one day Shivaguru had a vision of God Shiva, who granted their wish for a son. Shiva made them choose between a long-lived ordinary son and a short-lived scholarly and virtuous one. Their choice fell on a saintly and brilliant offspring whom


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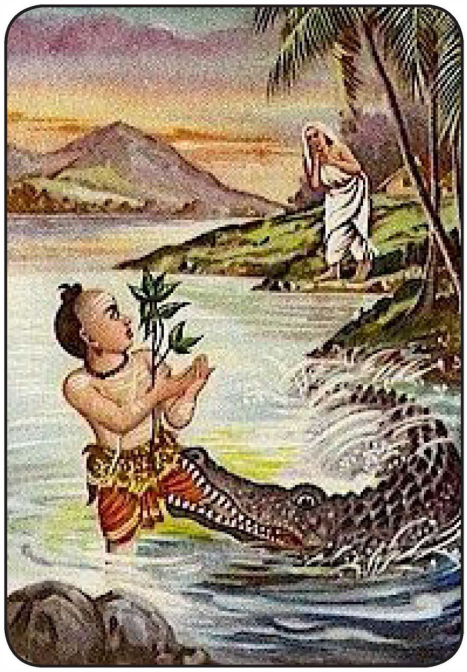
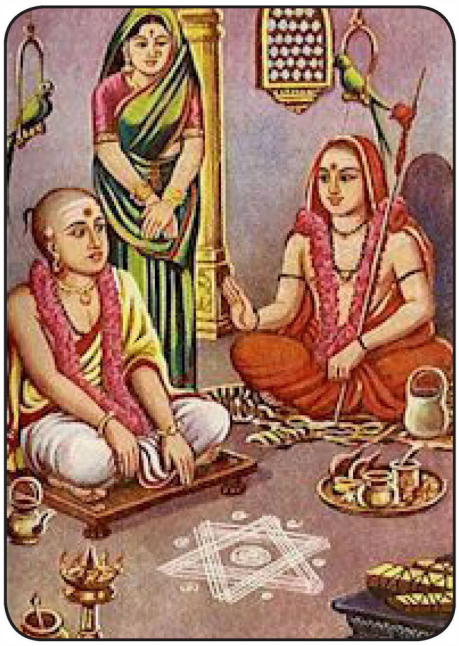
they named Shankara in honor of the Lord. Shankara is widely regarded as an incarnation of Shiva. The name Shankara (from *sham* "to pacify/be pacified" and *kri* "to make") means literally "peace-maker," which is one of 1,008 sacred names of Shiva. From a closer study of Shankara's works and hints in the writings of his disciples, it appears that he was leaning more toward the worship of Vishnu rather than Shiva.

The ten or so traditional hagiographies (*vijaya*) about Shankara all report that his birth was surrounded with extraordinary phenomena, and in fact his entire life was filled with miracles. His genius manifested early in life, and he is said to have mastered the teachings of the four *Vedas* by the age of eight and the textbooks (*shâstra*) by the age of twelve. He completed his major exegetical work, a commentary on the *Brahma-Sûtra,* in his sixteenth year. This is not impossible, as we know that a contemporary master, Swami Veda Bharati (formerly Pandit Usharbudh Arya), memorized the 20,000 verses of the *Vedas* when he was only eight years old, and by the age of eleven started to teach and address groups of thousands of people.



Shankara attacked by a crocodile

Most hagiographies mention the following important incident in Shankara's life: One day, when still a tender youth, he was bathing in the Cûrnâ river. A crocodile caught one of his feet, and the boy's screams brought his mother running to the river. Panicked but helpless she stood at the water's edge. Shankara called out to her that in order to see his life spared, she would have to agree for him to become a renouncer (*samnyâsin*) at once. Fearing for her son's life, she consented, even though she had hoped to see him happily married. Shankara uttered a *mantra,* and promptly the crocodile loosened its grip. Shortly afterward, he left home in search of his *guru,* entrusting his mother to the care of relatives. Shankara promised his mother, however, that whenever she really wanted him to be with her, he would return. He did so at her hour of death, and even broke with tradition by taking care of the funeral rites himself, which had the villagers' strong disapproval.



Shankara debating his future disciple Mandana Mishra

Traveling north, Shankara arrived at the Narmadâ River where he found Govinda, his *guru,* meditating in a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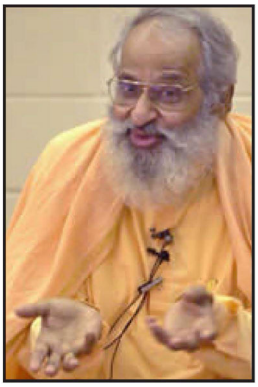

Swami Veda Bharati

cave. The sage called out to the visitor, asking for him to identify himself. Shankara replied by chanting the *Dasha-Shlokî,* consisting of ten verses that affirm one's transcendental identity: "I am neither earth nor water, neither fire nor air . . . but only Shiva." Delighted with the boy's response, Govinda accepted Shankara as his disciple.

Shankara stayed with Govinda for several years, and by the grace of his *guru* attained Self-realization. At the end of Shankara's pupilage, his teacher asked him to pilgrimage to the sacred town of Vâranâsî (also called Kâshî) in order to write a commentary on the *Brahma-Sûtra,* which he did as soon as he arrived. In that holy place, Shankara quickly attracted his first disciples, a number of whom he seems to have helped to the point of Self-realization. His numerous disciples include Padmapâda (or Sânandana), who wrote a subcommentary on the first four aphorisms of the *Brahma-Sûtra* entitled *Panca-Pâdikâ*. Shankara's other chief disciples are Ânanda Giri (author of the *Nyâya-Nirnaya*), Sureshvara (formerly called Mandana Mishra, author of the *Naishkarmya-Siddhi* and various subcommentaries), and Trotaka (author of the *Shruti-Sâra-Samuddharana*). In addition to his commentary on the *Brahma-Sûtra,* Shankara also wrote learned commentaries on the major *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*. In addition, he produced the excellent *Upadesha-Sâhasrî* and a commentary on the *adhyâtma* chapter of Âpastamba's *Dharma-Sûtra*.

Moreover, he is said to also have authored a number of popular tracts whose authenticity is doubtful, such as the *Viveka-Cûdâmani,* the *Âtma-Bodha,* the *Aparoksha-Anubhûti,* the *Manîshâ-Pancaka,* the *Laghu-Vâkya-Vritti,* the *Drig-Drishya-Viveka,* the *Pancî-Karana,* the *Advaita-Siddhânta,* the *Sâdhana-Pancaka,* and the *Sarva-Vedânta-Siddhânta-Sâra-Samgraha*. Shankara also is credited with the authorship of many popular devotional hymns, notably the *Dakshinâmûrti-Stotra,* the *Guru-Ashtaka,* the *Bhaja-Govinda,* the *Hari-Stotra,* and the *Ânanda-Laharî,* and the *Saundarya-Laharî.*

It was in Vâranâsî (modern Benares) that Shankara conceived of the idea of establishing four monasteries (*matha,* Indian English: *mutt*) of the Dashanâmî order: Shringerî Matha in the South, Jyotî Matha in the North, Dvâraka Matha in the West, and Purî Matha in the East. He traveled widely, engaged in lively philosophical debates, and won over large numbers of people to his form of Vedânta. In his five-volume work *A History of Indian Philosophy* (vol. 1, p. 429), S. N. Dasgupta observed:

> So great is the influence of the philosophy propounded by Shankara and elaborated by his illustrious followers that whenever we speak of the Vedânta philosophy we mean the philosophy that was propounded by Shankara.

Morris Winternitz, in the concluding third volume of his *Geschichte der indischen Litteratur* (History of Indian Literature) remarked that Shankara "has for centuries been considered one of the greatest sages among the learned of all India" (p. 432). His nondualist metaphysics of Advaita


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## FOR REFLECTION

**1.** When studying Vedânta texts, we can see how various teachers sought validation for their own interpretation of the philosophical and spiritual legacy of the revealed literature (*shruti*). Upholding tradition was very important to them. How do you relate to received knowledge? How much of your intellectual understanding is based on your personal experience and logical analysis, how much on hearsay? Do you have a childish (naïve, trusting, believing) attitude toward tradition, or an adolescent (questioning, rebellious) attitude? Do you tend to examine issues independently? Are you receptive to different viewpoints?

**2.** The opening phrase in the extant *Brahma-Sûtra* is *athato brahma-jijnâsâ* and implies that the supplicant wishes to know about Reality and the means to attain it. What degree of interest do you have in uncovering the essential truth of all things? Is it an underlying interest and process in your life, a dire concern, or a philosophical interest?

**3.** If you found someone whom you deemed to be worthy of such ultimate questions—perhaps someone who was learned, realized, compassionate, and only had the concern for your spiritual welfare—what questions would you ask him or her?

## REMEMBER

As we noted before, we recommend that you write your responses to "For Reflection" and also to the Homework questions in your notebook. Many students have found this very helpful in assimilating yogic ideas and making them relevant to their daily life and spiritual practice.


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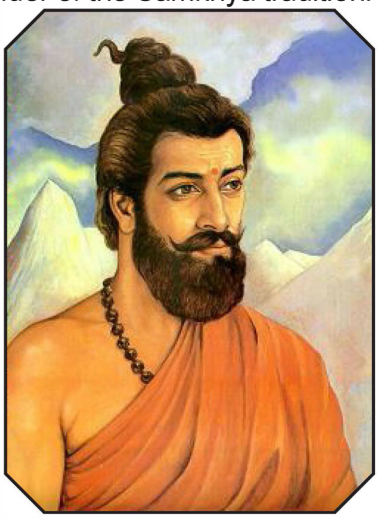
Vedânta was chiefly responsible for the demise of Buddhism on the Indian peninsula. Shankara's many accomplishments become even more astonishing when we know that, according to tradition, he died at the age of thirty-two.

Of all the Vedânta teachers, Shankara has fascinated Western scholars the most, and his system of radical nondualism has enticed them to write numerous books and articles. In India, however, the theistic branches of Vedânta have exercised a far greater influence on both scholars and practitioners.

## Sâmkhya
**(YT, pp. 75-77)**

Hindu tradition universally regards Sage Kapila as the original founder of the Sâmkhya tradition. There have been several sages bearing this name. The word *kapila* ("tawny") is first mentioned in the *Rig-Veda* (10.27.16). The *Aitareya-Brâhmana* (7.17), which may belong to c. 2000 B.C., refers to the *kâpileyas*, which means the members of the Kapila clan, and also in those days the *Yajur-Veda* had a Kapila branch. Moreover, Kapila and his two main disciples Âsuri and Pancashikha are mentioned in the *Parishishta* ("Addenda," 43.3.4) to the *Atharva-Veda*—a collection of 72 works that was put together between 200 B.C. and 500 A.D. The first clear reference to a sage named Kapila linked with typical Sâmkhya teachings, however, can be found in the *Shvetâshvatara-Upanishad* (5.2), which may have been composed c. 600 B.C., give or take a few centuries. In the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (10.26), the God-man Krishna declares that of all the adepts (*siddha*), he is the sage Kapila.


Sage Kapila

This great sage is traditionally credited with the authorship of aphorisms (*sûtra*) expounding the original teachings of Sâmkhya. This, however, is very unlikely as *Sûtra* works were not composed until the mature phase of a philosophical tradition. There is such a work for Sâmkhya, but it was authored in the medieval period and was simply attributed to Kapila. The early Kapila appears to have been a ritualist, as can be expected.

In the Pre-Classical Yoga literature (e.g., the epics, metric *Upanishads*), the sage called Kapila is (a) either a different individual or (b), less likely, the Vedic Kapila and his disciples were granted extremely long life spans to promulgate teachings more characteristic of a later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age. Perhaps (c), over the centuries, the two Kapilas became merged in the imagination of Hindu traditionalists. Alternatively (d), later teachings were simply attributed to the Vedic Kapila and his disciples, as is often the case in India, which means we do not know the real names of the originators of those teachings.

The first systematization of Pre-Classical Sâmkhya appears to have been the sixty-topic scheme attributed to Pancashikha, who is remembered as the author of the *Shashti-Tantra* ("Work on the Sixty [Topics]"). Since the work itself has been lost and the traditional commentators differ in their interpretations, we can only speculate about its actual contents.

Pancashikha is mentioned already in the Buddhist canonical literature (i.e., in the *Indriya-Bhâvana-Sutta* 3.52), and so must be placed prior to c. 550 B.C. His teaching was then influential enough to warrant specific refutation. The argument was over whether it is necessary for yogic meditation to lead to the cessation of all sensory functioning or, as the Buddha maintained, only to control over the senses. Other Pre-Classical Sâmkhya (or Sâmkhya-Yoga) teachers were Vârshaganya (or Vrishagana), Jaigîshavya, Vindhyavâsin, and a certain Patanjali (apparently contemporaneous with Patanjali the Yoga master).

Sâmkhya received its classical formulation at the hands of Îshvara Krishna (c. 450 A.D.), who authored the *Sâmkhya-Kârikâ*. The (pre-classical) developmental stages of the Sâmkhya tradition can be followed in some of the *Upanishads*, the *Mahâbhârata*, and select *Purânas*. According to tradition, Kapila was a panentheist, whereas Classical Sâmkhya is dualistic and atheistic. A Vedântic interpretation of Sâmkhya was put forward in the sixteenth century by the scholar-practitioner Vijnâna Bhikshu.

The name *sâmkhya* is derived from *samkhyâ* meaning "number." In a more generic sense, *sâmkhya* denotes the systematic enumeration of groups of data as can be found in medical, legal, grammatical, and mathematical systems. In the context of cosmology, this kind of grouping is the crux of the Sâmkhya tradition. Its purpose is to provide the necessary understanding (*viveka*) of existence in order to lead the spiritual practitioner to liberation.

Although Classical Sâmkhya and Classical Yoga share many similar viewpoints, they are in fact teachings with distinct understandings and methods of practice. It is wrong to assume that Sâmkhya merely supplies the theoretical framework for the practice of Yoga. The epics and *Purânas* evince the existence of an early Sâmkhya-Yoga tradition, which subsequently split into two independent

**Sâmkhya's Five Arguments for the Existence of Prakriti**

1. All things are limited and finite, and therefore their source must be something that is unlimited and infinite.

2. All things have common characteristics that are capable of producing in us pleasure, pain, or indifference, and therefore there must be a principle that accounts for this threefold effect (i.e., the three gunas of Nature).

3. All effects spring from a potent cause.

4. Effect and cause differ from each other, and hence there must be a common cause for all effects.

5. The unity perceivable in the universe points to a single cause.


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developments.

Sâmkhya is one of the most influential schools of Hinduism, as other traditions have adopted many of its principal ideas. The most important and characteristic notion of Sâmkhya philosophy is the set of the twenty-four categories of existence (called *tattvas*), which seek to explain the basic phenomena of Nature (*prakriti*). To these, we must add the twenty-fifth category, viz., the transcendental Spirit (*purusha*), and, in some Sâmkhya schools, the twenty-sixth principle, which is the ultimate all-comprising Reality (sometimes called *îshvara* or "Lord"). The sharp dualism of Classical Sâmkhya was successfully challenged by Vedânta, and consequently Vedânta assumed the prominence that was once enjoyed by Sâmkhya.

According to Îshvara Krishna, the objective of Sâmkhya is to point a way beyond suffering (*duhkha*). The means of escape from suffering is constant discernment (*viveka*) between Spirit (our true identity) and Nature, which unfolds from its transcendental core by way of the twenty-four categories of existence (see the diagram in YT, p. 76). Nature here stands for the principle of unconscious (*acit*) existence—from the transcendental level of sheer potentiality (called *prakriti-pradhâna*) to various levels of pure energetic existence (the diverse "subtle" realms and their forms) to our familiar world of space-time with its concrete (material) objects.

Beyond these levels or aspects of Nature abides *purusha*, the superconscious Self beyond all modification. Because the Self, or Spirit, transcends Nature, we are able to overcome our fundamental spiritual ignorance and the suffering it breeds.

According to Classical Sâmkhya, mind and world—or psyche and cosmos—are forms of the same unconscious principle, *prakriti*. Thus, in this model, the mind is deemed just as unconscious as the body. What gives the body-mind the appearance of being conscious is the ever-present Spirit. The shift in awareness that occurs through the practice of discernment progressively reveals to us the shocking truth that Nature (body, mind, and world) is utterly unconscious and mere habit. At the same time, when wisdom dawns, we catch a glimpse of the complementary aspect of this truth, namely that we are Spirit and as such are inherently free from the mechanisms of Nature. When our spiritual journey fulfills itself, we recover our true identity, which is the *purusha*. This state of freedom is called *kaivalya*.

The radical dualism of Classical Sâmkhya (and Classical Yoga) is problematical and philosophically unconvincing, but every single metaphysical or

In Kapila's doctrine, for the first time in the history of the world, the complete independence and freedom of the human mind, its full confidence in its own powers, were exhibited.

**—Richard Garbe**
*Philosophy of Ancient India,* p. 1

**Sâmkhya's Three Arguments for the Plurality of Purushas**

1. If there were only a single *purusha,* the life experience, birth, death of one individual would apply to all individuals in the same moment.

2. If there were only a single *purusha,* the bondage or liberation of one individual would mean the bondage or liberation of all in the same moment.

3. We can see differences at the empirical level.


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philosophical system contains assumptions that satisfy some but not others. No model can capture all of reality! Apart from the twenty-four categories of existence, Sâmkhya teachers also developed the popular notion of the three *gunas*, or principle qualities of Nature. Further discussion of the *gunas* can be found in the section on Classical Yoga in *The Yoga Tradition,* p. 242.

**Sâmkhya's Five Arguments for the Existence of Purusha**

1. All compound things exist for the benefit of something higher.

2. All things are composed of the unconscious *gunas* and therefore the principle of awareness must transcend them.

3. The diverse sensations, thoughts, etc., are experienced as pertaining to a single subject, which must be transcendental to *prakriti*.

4. *Prakriti,* which is by definition unconscious (*acit*), cannot itself experience its effects.

5. Some beings aspire to liberation, which implies the existence of a principle that is not bound by *prakriti*.

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# Yoga

**(YT, p. 77)**

Yoga as a philosophical system (*darshana*) refers to Classical Yoga, or Râja Yoga, as expounded by Sage Patanjali in c. 150 A.D. As this system is discussed at length in our 250-hour distance-learning course on *Classical Yoga*, there is no need for further elaboration at this point. Let it suffice to show the differences and commonalities between Classical Sâmkhya and Classical Yoga in the form of the following table:

## COMPARISON BETWEEN CLASSICAL SÂMKHYA AND CLASSICAL YOGA

### MAIN COMMONALITIES

1. Purusha and Prakriti are utterly transcendental principles
2. Prakriti is singular; Purushas are multiple
3. Prakriti is unconscious; Purusha is pure Awareness
4. Prakriti is self-transforming giving rise to all finite things; Purusha is indivisible, unchanging, eternal
5. Prakriti is associated with the experience of suffering (*duhkha*); Purusha is not
6. There is no actual connection between Purusha and Prakriti, though it appears so at the empirical level
7. Liberation consists in realizing one's Purusha nature apart from Prakriti

### MAIN DIFFERENCES

1. According to Classical Sâmkhya, liberation is possible through mere insight (*vijnâna*) and renunciation; Classical Yoga insists that one must practice profound meditation to the point of *asamprajnâta-samâdhi* (superconscious ecstasy) in order to transform the unconscious mind and rid it of all karmic deposits
2. Classical Sâmkhya denies the existence of a supreme Being (*îshvara*), but Classical Yoga accepts such an entity and encourages a positive attitude toward it (called *îshvara-pranidhâna*)
3. There are many terminological divergencies between the two systems suggesting subtle doctrinal differences


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Sage Kapila

## Satkârya-Vâda

One of the topics of philosophy is causality: What is the nature of cause and effect, and what is their relationship? We can say that a cause is something that invariably and necessarily precedes an effect. The Indian philosopher-sages have elaborated various positions (*vâda*) on this subject:

• *Ârambha-vâda* or *asatkârya-vâda*: An effect is a new creation, a new beginning (*ârambha*); it does *not* preexist (*asat*) in the cause. This is the view of Nyâya, Vaisheshika, and Madhva's Dvaita Vedânta.

- *Satkârya-vâda*: The effect is implied in, that is, preexists (*sat*) in the cause. It is a transformation of its cause. This view has two important subvarieties:
- *Parinâma-vâda*: The effect is an actual transmutation (parinâma) of the cause, which is the view of the tradition of Sâmkhya and Râmânuja's Vishishta Advaita. The classical example is: An earthen vessel (the effect) is only a transformation of clay (the cause).
- *Vivarta-vâda*: The effect is only an apparent (illusory) transformation of the cause, which alone is real. Thus the world (the effect) is unreal or illusory, while the Absolute—be it called *brahman* or *dharmadhâtu*—alone is real. This is the position of Shankara's Advaita Vedânta and Mahâyâna and Vajrayâna Buddhism.

According to the widespread traditional teaching of *satkârya-vâda*, all the effects exist in an unmanifest, or potential, state in the cause. The world unfolds out of the "implicate order" of the transcendental Nature (*prakriti, prakriti-pradhâna*). It progressively takes shape proceeding from the subtle (*sûkshma*) realms to the coarse (*sthûla*) or material realm. This evolution occurs because of an innate tension in *prakriti,* which, ultimately, is due to unresolved karmic issues. Thus the creation of the world proceeds in conjunction (*samyoga*) with the transcendental Spirit (*purusha*). It is this conjunction, or correlation, that the *yogin* wants to uncouple by realizing his true nature as Spirit.

In this process of evolution, *prakriti* is the material cause (*utpâda-kârana*), whereas *purusha* is merely an instrumental cause (*nimitta*). The distinction between these two types of cause becomes clearer when we use the traditional example of clay (material cause), earthen vessel (effect), and potter (instrumental cause).


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## ADDITIONAL SOURCE READINGS

**Excerpts from the *Sâmkhya-Kârikâ* and the *Sâmkhya-Sûtra***

by Georg Feuerstein

The following exerpts from two major Sâmkhya works are meant to give you an idea of some of the key features of this system, both in its strictly dualistic and its nondualistic versions. The *Sâmkhya-Kârikâ* of Îshvara Krishna follows a dualistic perspective, while the later *Sâmkhya-Sûtra* whose author is unknown but is attributed to the sage Kapila. Because Samkhya's ontology (science of being) is so close to that of Classical Yoga, it seems worthwhile to examine it more closely. The translations from the Sanskrit are by Georg Feuerstein.

## *Sâmkhya-Kârikâ*

Because of the onslaught (*abhigâta*) of the triple suffering, inquiry (*jijnâsâ*) into the cause of that onslaught [arises]. If [it is said that] this [inquiry] is futile because empirical [means of removing suffering are available], [we argue]: No, because [such perceptible means] are not final or lasting. **(1)**

***Comments:*** The three kinds of suffering referred to here are: (a) subjective (*âdhyâtmika*, comprising both physical and mental suffering), (b) objective (*âdhibhautika*), and (c) relating to the deities (â*dhidaivika*, that is,due to higher influences).

The revealed (*ânushravika*) [means of removing suffering] are like the empirical [means of medicine or psychiatry, which are ultimately ineffective], because they are connected with impurity, destruction, and excess. [A method that is] different and superior to that is discernment (*vijnâna*) between the manifest, the unmanifest, and the Knower (*jna*). **(2)**

***Comments:*** The manifest and the unmanifest are the two major modes of cosmic existence (*prakriti*). The Knower is none other than the transcendental Spirit, or Self (*purusha*). We normally confuse these three by egoically identifying with our experiences. In the task of discerning these three realities correctly, scriptural knowledge cannot guide us too far. We must *practice* discern-


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ment in every moment and thereby discover the ultimate reality of Spirit, the Knower.

The primordial Cosmos (*mûla-prakriti*) is uncreated. The seven [cosmic levels]—from the great one (*mahat*) on—are both created and creative. The sixteen [aspects of cosmic existence] are created. Spirit is neither created nor creative. **(3)**

***Comments*:** In other words, only the Cosmos, or Nature, is responsible for creation, change, and transformation, while Spirit is absolutely unrelated to creation.

Perception (*drishta*), inference (*anumâna*), and reliable testimony (*âpta-vacana*) [are the three means of correct knowledge]. Because [of these three] all [other] means of knowledge] are validated. The threefold means of knowledge is appropriate because through the means of correct knowledge the knowable [reality] is established. **(4)**

***Comments:*** This somewhat obscure aphorism simply states that whatever means or instrument of knowledge can be considered to yield valid knowledge, it must fall into one of the three categories: perception, inference, or reliable testimony. These are also often referred to as "proofs." Thus, analogy, which is recognized in some systems, as a proof, necessarily falls into one of the three means of valid knowledge, or proofs.

Perception is the [sensory] ascertainment (*adhyavasâya*) of particular objects. Inference is said to be threefold and to depend upon a characteristic mark (*linga*) and that which bears the mark *lingin*). Reliable testimony is reliable authority (*âpta-shruti*). **(5)**

***Comments:*** Here each accepted means of knowledge is defined. Perception relies on perceptible objects. Inference is a logical procedure that takes what in logic is called the "middle term" (*linga*) and the "major term" (*lingin*) into proper account. For instance, the inferential statement 'Where there is smoke, there is fire" has "smoke" as the *linga* and "fire" as the *lingin*. The three forms of inference are (a) *a priori* (*pûrvavat*), (b) *a posteriori* (*sheshavat*), and (c) based on general observation (*sâmânyatodrishta*).

Knowledge of supersensible [things] [is gained] through inference. That which is supersensible (*paroksha*) and is not established even by that [inference] is established by reliable tradition (*âpta-âgama*). **(6)**

***Comments:*** You yourself might not see the *cakras,* but a Yoga master does. If you don't trust inference that the *cakras* exist, the testimony of a Yoga adept ought to be considered reliable and valid. The Sâmkhya authorities had a strong interest in including reliable testimony among the proofs, because they talked about invisible realities, notably Spirit, the cosmic Matrix (*prakriti*), the higher mind, and so on. We cannot see them, but that does not mean they don't exist. For the twenty-four ontological categories of existence recognized by Sâmkhya, please see *The Yoga*


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Because all aggregates are for the sake of another; because of the differentiation (*viparyaya*) of the three qualities (*guna*) and other properties [of cosmic existence]; because there must be control; because there must be the presence of an experiencer, and because there is a tendency toward liberation (*kaivalya*), therefore Spirit (*purusha*) exists. (**17)**

***Comments:*** Here we have a clear application of inference. Alas, the Sâmkhya authorities shows us flawed inference, since they are using from empirical facts to establish a transcendental reality (namely Spirit). This way of thinking has been cricitized in some detail by various Buddhist thinkers as being fallacious and circular. It certainly strikes us as such and in this regard the Sâmkhya position is similar to medieval scholasticism with its theological "proofs" of the existence of God.

Because of individual distribution of birth, death, and the "instruments" [i.e., the ten senses]; because of the nonsimultaneity of activities, and because of the differentiation of the three *gunas* [in all cosmic realities], the plurality (*bahutva*) of Spirit is established. **(18)**

***Comments:*** Here are some more spurious inferences, which are intended to establish the "fact" that Spirit is not singular (as in most schools of Vedânta) but plural. Sâmkhya claims that there is one *purusha* for each empirical (human) being.

And from that distinction [between Spirit and aggregates] the witnessingship (*sâkshitva*) of the spirit is established [and also that Spirit] is isolated (*kaivalya*), neutral, a seeingness (*drashtritva*), and nonactor (*akartri-bhâva*). **(19)**

***Comments:*** Again the inferences about Spirit are logically flawed. Here Spirit is said to be the transcendental Witness of all processes occuring in the cosmos (specifically one's body and mind). This continuous witnessing of *prakriti* is made possible because Spirit is self-contained ("isolated") and perfectly impartial. Spirit is pure seeing and pure inactivity (noncreativity).

Hence, because of the conjunction (*samyoga*) with that [Spirit], the insentient "sign" [i.e., the mind, a product of *prakriti*] appears to be sentient. Similarly, from the actorship of the *gunas,* the neutral (*udâsîna*) [Spirit] appears to be an actor. **(20)**

***Comments:*** This stanza captures the vital distinction between Spirit and cosmic existence. The former is supremely aware, while the latter lacks all awareness but only *appears* to be sentient by virtue of its association with Spirit. We find the same teaching in Patanjali's *Yoga-Sûtra*. The notion of "connection/conjunction/association" (*samyoga*) does not suggest a contact between solid objects but is, in effect, also merely apparent. However, Sâmkhya emphasizes that this connection, or union, between *purusha* and *prakriti* is the transcendental foundation for the entire creative, evolutionary series that occurs within *prakriti*, leading first to the emergence of high mental states (*mahat/buddhi,* etc.) and then, ultimately, to the emergence of our familiar material universe. In *kârikâ 21,* Îshvara Krishna states that this connection is like the association between


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a blind and a lame person. The blind peson would be *prakriti,* which lacks sentience, and the lame person would be *purusha,* who is completely inactive.

This cosmic evolution (*prakriti-krita*) from the great one [*mahat,* cosmic intelligence] and so forth down to the material objects, though [appearing] as if for her own sake (*sva-artha*), is brought about for the sake of another (*para-artha*) [i.e., Spirit]—[that is,] for the release (*vimoksha*) of each *purusha* [from the world of change, or *samsâra*]. **(56)**

***Comments:*** Here we learn that cosmic existence (*prakriti*) has the purpose of freeing the many *purushas* from their bonds to finite existence by establishing them in their primordial purity and perfect omniscience. From the unenlightened perspective, the Cosmos seems to exist for its own sake. More specifically, we as humans appear to exist entirely for our own benefit, our own goals, but the bigger truth is that our body and mind have an innate tendency toward the transcendence of the ego, the body, and the mind in favor of enlightenment.

Just as the flow of insentient milk is for the purpose of the growth of a calf, so the flow of the cosmic foundation (*pradhâna*) [into countless forms of existence] is for the purpose of the liberation of Spirit. **(57)**

***Comments:*** The meaning of this stanza should be clear.

Just as a dancing girl, having exhibited herself to the spectator, ceases to dance, so *prakriti*, revealing herself to Spirit, ceases [to manifest herself in countless modes and forms]. **(59)**

***Comments:*** This is a classic portrayal of cosmic existence, which exists merely in order to enable the transcendental Witness, the ultimate Spectator, to abide in total purity instead of succumbing to the illusion of being associated with a finite body and mind. As stanza 61 spells out, once the dancing girl has been noticed by the spectator, she shyly withdraws from the spectator's glance never to be seen again. Upon liberation, the world vanishes for the liberated Spirit. She continues to hold others spell bound until they too awaken. The entire process of bondage occurs only within *prakriti,* for Spirit is ever free.

Thus, from the practice (*abhyâsa*) of the principles (*tattva*) arises the insight "I am not," "nothing is mine," [which], owing to non-error and without residue [of karma], is pure and absolute. **(64)**

***Comments:*** The phrase *tattva-abhyâsa* presumably stands for the Samkhya practice of being present as the the transcendental Witness while discerning between the twenty-four ontological principles and their many manifestations in life. The insight "I am not" (*na asmi*) and the related recognition refer to the transcendence of the ego and the sense of owning anything, which are closely connected in the empirical psyche. Even though, upon enlightenment, Spirit remains for a while associated with a particular body and mind. This is so because of prevailing


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karmic momentum or what is called the "force of subliminal activators" (*sâmskara-vasha*). Upon death, the body and mind dissolves and then Spirit's apparent association with finite existence is totally dissolved as well. We are told in stanza 70 that this esoteric (*guhya*) knowledge was first taught by "the great sage," namely Kapila (the Sun) to Âsuri, who imparted it to Pancashikha, who then propounded it to many others. It finally reached Ishvara Krishna who, having understood it thoroughly, composed the *Sâmkhya-Kârikâ*.

## *Sâmkhya-Sûtra*

Now, the total cessation (*nivritti*) of the threefold suffering is the ultimate purpose of man (*purusha*). **(1.1)**

***Comments:*** This aphorism makes a remarkable and bold statement: that the human being has an ultimate purpose and that total cessation of suffering is possible. in which Western philosophical system would we find such a claim?

The accomplishment of that [total cessation] is not by empirical [means] because [there is] the perception of continuance [of suffering] even after the [supposed] cessation. **(1.2)**

***Comments:*** For example, one might effect the diminution of suffering by obtaining wealth or a medical cure; but when that wealth is lost or when a supposed cure turns out to have unexpected side effects, then suffering is quickly reinstated.

Bondage (*bandha*) is due to the error [of not discerning between Spirit and Cosmos, or pure Awareness and mental activities]. **(1.56a)** <*This aphorism is not found in all editions.*>

The removal of this [bondage] is to be effected by the appropriate means, just like darkness [is removed by lighting a torch]. **(1.56b)**

***Comments:*** The means of ending bondage is discernment between what is real and what is unreal. Specifically, this discernment consists in distinguishing carefully between Spirit and Cosmos.

[Bondage to finite existence] is merely verbal and is not a reality, because [bondage] resides [only] in the mind. **(1.58)**

***Comments:*** The total cessation of suffering is possible only upon liberation. Prior to liberation, however, suffering prevails as part of the condition of bondage. Yet, from a higher perspective, bondage is only a mind game, as is liberation. If we were *essentially* bound, we could never rid ourselves of all conditioning and suffering.


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[The objection that perception is not invariably based on a sensory object, because the Lord's perceptions are not thus based is invalid] because [the existence] of the Lord (*îshvara*) has not been proved. **(1.92)**

***Comments:*** The Sâmkhya system does not postulate a supreme God; hence it is atheistic. This aphorism simply states that *îshvara's* existence has not been proved, which is a cautious paraphrase of the idea that the Lord (a creator deity) does not exist. Aphorism 1.95 makes it clear that its author thought that references to *îshvara* in the sacred texts must be interpreted as glorifications (*prashamsa*) or devout homages of the liberated Spirit.

[The nature of Spirit is] continuous freedom. **(1.162)**

***Comments:*** One way of looking a freedom is to explain it as the absence of the three primary qualities (*guna*) of cosmic existence. Spirit is acosmic and therefore unconditional and devoid of the *gunas*.

And finally, [the nature of Spirit is] indifference [to suffering or pleasure, and so on]. **(1.163)**

***Comments:*** Here "indifference" (*audâsînya*) stands for non-agency (*akartritva)*. Spirit only *appears* to be active because of the influence of the mind, in particular the ego sense.

The I-maker is [of the nature of] conceit. **(2.16)**

***Comments:*** This aphorism really sums it all up: The ego sense is a distortion arising within the mind, which then conjures up the entire vista of cosmic existence as entirely separate from Spirit. Remember, the *Sâmkhya-Sûtra* favors metaphysical nondualism! When this artificial coloring of Reality is retracted by means of discernment, liberation is the case.


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# FOR REFLECTION

**1.** The Sâmkhya categories can be witnessed tangibly in the material world as well as in the mind. For instance, when we examine the objective physical world, we can see the cohesiveness and stability of the earth element, the liquidity of the water element, the mobility of the wind element, and the perceptibility of the fire element (in the form of light). We can witness the actions of the elements in the cyclic changes of the seasons. We can recognize the play of the same elements also in our mind. For instance, we might feel heavy (earth), buoyant (air), emotional (water), or aggravated (fire). How does your body and your mind feel in this moment? Can you see the oscillation of the elements throughout the day?

**2.** On a similar note, it is the influence of the *gunas* themselves that is perhaps easier to recognize. How do you see them working in your body-mind and in the environment?

**3.** Do you equate your mind with the brain? Or do you believe that the mind transcends the brain either in part or completely? To what extent does your mind (your thinking, feeling, perceiving) run along well-worn grooves (habit patterns)? Are you able to stand back from your mental mechanisms and assume the position of the observer? Is the observer the Self, or is observing itself merely a function of the mind? What is your observation on this point?

**4.** If we are always inherently free, as Sâmkhya and Yoga teach, then how do we succumb to the illusion that we are a finite body-mind, a personality with a history, a suffering ego? Do you have a solution to this philosophical problem? Or do you hold that certain questions are unanswerable or, in the final analysis (i.e., when we attain the state of liberation), insignificant and meaningless?

**5.** Do you feel the basic nature and structure of the cosmos is definite, or explainable in terms of universal categories and principles as found in the Sâmkhya system? Do you feel the universe is a finite set that will eternally be under the same laws, or is it evolving and always needing new interpretation? Do you look to the findings of modern science or to the metaphysics of the East to understand Nature? Do you believe that Nature has the purpose of liberating those trapped in its complicated web? What metaphors are appropriate to explaining your view of the cosmos and Nature. For example, do you see it as a womb or nest of being, a tree of life, an inexhaustible web or net, mother, or field of activity?


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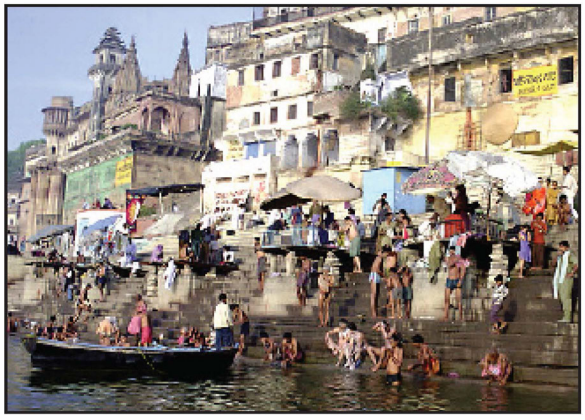
FOR REFLECTION ctd.

**6.** Are you responsible for the impact your behavior or mere presence has on others? If so, do you actually assume responsibility for your actions, especially when their effect is negative? Or do you tend to blame others or external circumstances?

## REMEMBER

As we noted before, we recommend that you write your responses to "For Reflection" and also to the Homework questions in your notebook. Many students have found this very helpful in assimilating yogic ideas and making them relevant to their daily life and spiritual practice.



Varanasi (Benares)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# Vaisheshika

**(YT, pp. 77-78)**

The Vaisheshika tradition was founded by Kanâda (c. 500–600 B.C.), author of the *Vaisheshika-Sûtra*. (In the YT, Vaisheshika is labeled a "school," but "tradition" would have been more correct, as there are several Vaisheshika schools.) This system is also known as Aulûka, because apparently Kanâda had the habit of meditating during the day and gathering food at night like an owl (*ulûka*).

The Vaisheshika system, which is often grouped together with the Nyâya tradition, is comparable to ancient Greek "physics," or atomism, which included metaphysical notions. Like Sâmkhya, this tradition favors enumeration, but the Vaisheshika is concerned with the particulars (*vishesha*) of experience, as captured in philosophical categories like substance, quality, activity, general, particular, and inherence. To these six, later thinkers added the logical category of nonexistence. It should not surprise us that Caraka's classical treatise on Âyur-Veda—the *Caraka-Samhitâ*—makes use of basic Vaisheshika teachings; after all, one of the concerns of Âyur-Veda is to investigate the physical body and its material environment, which Vaisheshika's categories help to explain.

Vaisheshika admits of the existence of nine permanent "substances" (*dravya*): the five material elements (earth, water, fire, air, ether), space (*dik*), time (*kâla*), mind (*manas*), and Self (*âtman*).

Significantly, Kanâda's *Vaisheshika-Sûtra* begins with a discussion of the principle of *dharma*, the virtuous life, which leads to happiness and ultimate liberation. Through a thorough understanding of the six categories (see YT, p. 77), Kanâda explains, we can achieve the highest end. He accepts the authority of the *Vedas* in such matters, but, like Classical Sâmkhya, does not mention the existence of a supreme Being (*îshvara*) who created or maintains the world.

Later Vaisheshika thinkers, however, accept the existence of an *îshvara*, or unfettered Lord, who takes part in Nature's unfolding by directing its transformations. He is not a creator deity, but a transcendental agent who, through the subtle workings of an invisible force called *adrishta* (i.e., *karma*), arranges the universe.

The process of liberation is closely linked to the principle of *adrishta*, or potentiality for world experience, because in the *Vaisheshika-Sûtra* (5.2.17) the bond between soul and matter is described as being caused by it. The preceding aphorism announces that the condition of *yoga* transcends the experience of pleasure and pain while being embodied. Aphorism 5.2.18 describes


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liberation (*moksha*) as that state wherein the Self is freed from any form of embodiment, which implies that the potential for rebirth is exhausted.

It is important to note that Vaisheshika is a pluralistic system, which accepts a multitude of individual beings, who can attain to this state of perfect freedom. The *Vaisheshika-Sûtra* (3.2.4) talks about the Self (*âtman*) as follows:

> Inhalation (*prâna*), exhalation (*apâna*), closing (*nimesha*) [the eyelids], opening (*unmesha*) [the eyelids], life, movement of the mind (*mano-gati*), modification of the other [sensory] instruments (*indriya-antara-vikâra*), pleasure, pain, desire (*icchâ*), and volition (*prayatna*) are signs of the Self.

These physical and mental activities all suggest, in Kanâda's view, that there is an ultimate agent behind them. Already in the ancient *Brihad-Âranyaka-Upanishad* (3.7.23), Sage Y*âjnavalkya* speaks of the "unseen Seer, the unheard Hearer, the unthought Thinker."

## Nyâya

**(YT, p. 78)**

Hindu traditionalists have sought to preserve their philosophical and spiritual heritage by defending the viewpoints of their revered teachers against the rival viewpoints of other systems. This often has led to doctrinal revision, although originality has been downplayed in the interest of safeguarding a particular tradition. Despite the pronounced conservatism of Hindu thought, which has been eager to leave the core teachings of a particular system untouched, the spirit of innovation has always been alive in India. This has guaranteed both adaptation and the periodic rejuvenation of a given system. The Nyâya tradition of logic reflects the trend of rational examination that has supported the evolution and refinement of thought in the history of Yoga. As a tradition, it has contributed to the methodology of numerous schools and allowed them to examine their positions more critically.

Akshapâda Gautama (c. 500 B.C.), the founder of Nyâya, was concerned with right knowledge, which prompted him to develop epistemology (the science of knowledge), logic, and the art of debate. As is made clear in the opening aphorism of the *Nyâya-Sûtra,* Gautama's system works with sixteen categories:

(1) *Pramâna* — the means of right knowledge, consisting of *pratyaksha* ("perception"), *anumâna* ("inference"), *upamâna* ("comparison, ana-logy"), and *shabda* (lit. "word, sound," verbal knowledge, testimony)

(2) *Prameya* — the object of right knowledge, which can be any knowable thing but especially the Self (*atman*), higher mind (*buddhi*), lower mind (*manas*), body (*sharîra*), senses


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(*indriya*), material objects (*artha*), activity (*pravritti*), defects (*dosha*), rebirth (*pretyabhâva*), fruition (*phala*), suffering (*duhkha*), and release (*apvarga*)

(3) *Samshaya* — doubt

(4) *Prayojana* — purpose

(5) *Drishtânta* — familiar evidence

(6) *Siddhânta* — established conclusion

(7) *Avayava* — the "member" of a syllogism, comprising proposition (*pratijnâ*), reason (*hetu*), example (*udâharana*), application (*upanaya*), and conclusion (*nigamana*). Here is an example:

> *Proposition:* This hill is on fire.
> *Reason:* Because there is smoke.
> *Example:* Wherever there is smoke, there is fire, as in a chimney.
> *Application:* So there is smoke coming from this hill.
> *Conclusion:* Therefore this hill is on fire.

(8) *Tarka* — confutation, which is reasoning that reveals the nature of something by showing that all other assumptions about it are absurd. For instance, if pure Awareness were identical with the brain, it would undergo all kinds of changes, but this is not the realization of the great masters. We should also be able to locate it somewhere in the brain, yet pure Awareness is nonlocal.

(9) *Nirnaya* — ascertainment, which is a form of verification in case of doubt

(10) *Vâda* — discussion, which is submitting one's view(s) to the scrutiny of others for the sake of gaining right knowledge

(11) *Jalpa* — polemics, which Gautama deemed dishonorable

(12) *Vitandâ* — cavil, whose only purpose is to attack an opponent

(13) *Hetu-âbhâsa* — logical fallacy. Here is an example:

> *Proposition:* I don't need to practice.
> *Erratic reason:* Because I am already free.
> *Example:* Whatever is free (i.e., the Self) requires no practice.
> *Application:* So I am free.
> *Conclusion:* Therefore, I don't need to practice.

(14) *Cala* — equivocation, comprising word play, generalization, metaphor

(15) *Jâti* — futile argument, consisting in offering objections based on mere similarity or dissimilarity

(16) *Nigraha-sthâna* — disagreement in principle, comprising misunderstanding or total lack of understanding


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Like Classical Sâmkhya, Classical Yoga, and Vaisheshika, Nyâya posits numerous Selves. These Selves are transcendental and eternal but, like the coeternal atoms, lack consciousness, which the Nyâya teachers regard as an accidental quality only. The quality of consciousness manifests when the Self is conjoined with a mind. Upon liberation, no such conjunction exists. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a former president of India and noted philosopher, made the following severe remarks about this particular doctrine:

> The peace of extinguished consciousness may be the peace of death. The sleep without dreams is a state of torpor, and we may as well say that a stone is enjoying supreme felicity in a sound sleep without any disturbing dreams. The state of painless, passionless existence, which the Nyâya idealises, seems to be a mere parody of what man dreams to be. . . . Naiyâyikas [followers of Nyâya] are anxious to make out that the condition of freedom is one of bliss, but they cannot do so until they revise their conception of the soul's [Self's] relation to consciousness.
>
> —S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy,* vol. 2, p. 152

> It may seem as if the Vaisheshika was rather a disjointed and imperfect system. And to a certain extent it is so. Though it presupposes a knowledge of the Nyâya system, it frequently goes over the same ground as the Nyâya, though it does not quote verbatim from it.
>
> **—Max Müller**
> *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy,* p. 448

Similar to the Vaisheshika system, Nyâya's theology is also not very convincing. Its God is not the creator of the other eternal substances, such as the many Selves and atoms, but something of a supervisor of worldly activity. Yet even his supervisory function is limited by the invisible karmic force of *adrishta*. Gautama's *Sûtra,* like Kanâda's, does not even mention God. Later generations of Nyâya logicians attempted to correct this situation, and have even invented nine "proofs" of the existence of God. Since Kant, however, we know that such proofs are not ultimately convincing. That is why all the great Vedânta teachers—from Shankara to Râmânuja to Madhva—resorted to the authority of the *Vedas* instead of theological or logical reasoning when talking about the existence of God.

Neo-Nyâya (Nava-Nyâya) appeared in the twelfth century and had its main formulation in the *Tattva-Cintâmani* of Gangesha. Its most famous exponent was Raghunâtha (sixteenth century A.D.), a disciple of Gangesha. It is interesting to recall the historical and geographical context of these philosophical developments, which occurred in Navadvîpa, West Bengal. This town was home not only to Neo-Nyâya logicians but also to great teachers of the Bhakti movement, including the well-loved saint Caitanya. This contrast epitomizes so much of Indian spirituality, which is the most diversified in the world.


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## FURTHER READING

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Bhattacharya, S., and Karl Potter, eds. *Indian Philosophical Analysis: Nyāya-Vaisheshika From Gangesha to Raghunātha Śiromani*. Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, vol. 6. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Chakrabarty, Kisor Kumar. *Classical Indian Philosophy of Mind: The Nyaya Dualist Tradition*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1999.

Vattanky, John. *Nyaya Philosophy of Language*: New Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1995.

The Nyâya system attempts to reach reality through a rational analysis of knowledge. It shows that knowl-edge is not a simple formless awareness, but a complex phenomenon, both on account of the different operations involved in a single act of reasoning, and of the different faculties of man involved in the act of knowing.

**—J. B. Chethimattam**

*Patterns of Indian Thought* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971), p. 65

I have felt an acquaintance with the general spirit of Indian philosophy as a blessing from my very youth, being strengthened by it against all the antinomies of being and thinking, and nerved in all the encounters with the scepticism and materialism of our own ephemeral philosophy.

What I admire in Indian philosophers is that they never try to deceive us as to their principles and the consequences of their theories . . . They are *bona fide* idealists or materialists, monists or dualists, theists or atheists, because their reverence for truth is stronger than their reverence for anything else.

**—Max Müller**

*The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, pp. 409 and x


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# FOR REFLECTION

**1.** Logic and the art of debate have a long history in India, going back to the Vedic era. Logic has been an invaluable tool for the study and interpretation of the Vedic revelation and other bodies of sacred and secular knowledge within the Hindu tradition. Clearly, any tradition is fortified by reasonable and rational discourse. Even Caraka's treatise on Âyur-Veda includes a discussion of the methods and principles of debate by which physicians can challenge and test medical theories. So long as the goal of debate or dialogue is to solve real problems—notably human suffering—then logic serves a purpose. Misuses of logic in philosophy are not unheard of; Caraka mentions the use of logic in maintaining even incorrect positions. The art of debate can conceal truth as much as it can reveal insights and refine standards of knowledge. Because it was customary in India for the loser of a debate and his followers to convert to the victor's school, intellectually gifted teachers readily amassed large followings and fortunes. You can imagine the fierceness with which some debaters would defend their viewpoints, sometimes forgetting that all knowledge is only *model* and not *reality*. What role does reasoning play in your life? How do you use logic in your daily interactions? Do you always want to be right? Or are you easily swayed by someone else's argument? Do you occasionally succumb to polemics, cavil, logical fallacy, equivocation, futile argument, or disagreement as a matter of principle? Or do you enjoy proper investigation, reflection, and discussion? When making decisions, do you tend to follow logic or do you move according to intuition or instinct? For instance, does your philosophical standpoint direct your way of thinking? Do you consider that which is most beneficial or pleasurable to you in choosing actions?

**2.** What are the criteria of your value judgments and basic decisions? Take something as simple as your diet. Do you plan ahead before taking a meal, or observe what your body wants in the moment, or will you accept anything that is offered to you, say by a friend? Do you have strict guidelines for what you consume? Do you have the tendency to enjoy foods without considering their impact on your health? When considering health, what framework are you coming from? Are you thinking about the enzymes and nutrients available in food, the energetic quality, its appropriateness to your physical constitution, time of day, season, etc.?


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# QUESTIONNAIRE #9

Please SUBMIT this questionnaire to TYS: tyslearning@sasktel.net
Don't forget to include your full name, email address, date, and course title. Please refer to our instructions on p. 17.

**1. What major work did Mâdhava write?** *(Check one)*

(a) *Brahma-Sûtra*
(b) *Sarva-Darshana-Samgraha*
(c) *Sâmkhya-Sûtra*
(d) *Anu-Bhâshya*

**2. What kind of philosopy did the Cârvâkas espouse?** *(Check one)*

(a) ritualism
(b) spiritism
(c) materialism
(d) logic

**3. What does the term *âstika* mean?** *(Check one)*

(a) atheistic
(b) syncretistic
(c) heterodox
(d) orthodox

**4. Which of the following is the native Indian term for "Hinduism"?** *(Check one)*

(a) *sanâtana-dharma*
(b) *âtma-vidyâ*
(c) *jnâna-mârga*
(d) *vidyâ-shâstra*

**5. Which of the six traditional *darshanas* focuses on rituals?** *(Check one)*


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(b) Nyâya
(c) Vaisheshika
(d) Pûrva-Mîmâmsâ
(e) Yoga
(f) Sâmkhya

**6. Is it true that Kumarila Bhatta taught that proper ritual action is liberating?** *(Check one)*

(a) yes
(b) no

**7. Which traditional *darshana* states that the Self is unconscious?** *(Check one)*

(a) Uttara-Mîmâmsâ
(b) Nyâya
(c) Vaisheshika
(d) Pûrva-Mîmâmsâ
(e) Sâmkhya
(f) none

**8. Which of the following texts compose the *prasthâna-traya?*** *(Check one or more)*

(a) *Brahma-Sûtra*
(b) *Mahâbhârata*
(c) *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*
(d) *Vedas*
(e) *Brâhmanas*
(f) *Upanishads*
(g) *Dharma-Shâstra*
(h) *Viveka-Cûdûmani*

**9. What did Shankara teach?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) the world is nonexistent
(b) the world is unreal but exists
(c) the world as we know it exists only because of our spiritual ignorance
(d) the world is *brahman*
(e) the world is manifold and therefore cannot possibly be the One Reality


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**10. When did Kapila, the founder of Sâmkhya, live?** *(Check one)*

(a) 600 B.C. or earlier
(b) 200 A.D.
(c) 1500 A.D

**11. Which of the following works are attributed to Kapila, the Sâmkhya authority?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) *Sâmkhya-Sûtra*
(b) *Shvetâshvatara-Upanishad*
(c) *Vedas*
(d) *Shashti-Tantra*
(e) *Sâmkhya-Kârikâ*

**12. Who composed the *Sâmkhya-Kârikâ*?** *(Check one)*

(a) Vârshaganya
(b) Jaigîshavya
(c) Vindhyavâsin
(d) Îshvara Krishna

**13. Who interpreted Sâmkhya along nondualist (Vedântic) lines?** *(Check one)*

(a) Vârshaganya
(b) Jaigîshavya
(c) Vindhyavâsin
(d) Îshvara Krishna
(e) Vijnâna Bhikshu
(f) Patanjali

**14. Which of the following views correctly describes Sâmkhya?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) *ârambha-vâda*
(b) *asatkârya-vâda*
(c) *satkârya-vâda*
(d) *parinâma-vâda*
(e) *vivarta-vâda*


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**15. What is Sâmkhya's theological position?** *(Check one)*

(a) monotheism
(b) polytheism
(c) atheism
(d) agnosticism

**16. According to Sâmkhya, what are the two major modes of cosmic existence (*prakriti*)?** *(Check two or more)*

(a) subtle
(b) coarse
(c) transcendental
(d) immanent
(e) manifest
(f) unmanifest
(g) material
(h) immaterial

**17. According to Sâmkhya, who or what is the Knower?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) the conscious ego
(b) *brahman*
(c) the higher mind (*buddhi*)
(d) *purusha*
(e) *manas*
(f) transcendental *prakriti*

**18. Which of the six *darshanas* assumes a plurality of transcendental Selves?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) Yoga
(b) Sâmkhya
(c) Vaisheshika
(d) Nyâya
(e) Mîmâmsâ
(f) Vedânta


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# LESSON 10

## I. Objectives

This lesson has the following two objectives:

- to introduce Âyurveda and Siddha medicine, India's two great native systems of healing
- to elucidate the connection between traditional Indian medicine and Yoga

## II. Homework Assignments

- **Read** section V of Chapter 3 in *The Yoga Tradition* book (pp. 78–82)
- **Read** all materials of Lesson 10 in this Study Guide, including Additional Study Materials #39–40.
- **Ponder** the questions under "For Reflection" and jot down your significant thoughts.
- **Answer Questionnaire #10 and submit.**
- **Practical Assignment:** Consider your present state of health and how you relate to your own body as a result. If you are not very responsible about your health, for at least two weeks adopt one health-positive practice (such as a salutary change in your diet) and observe your sensations, feelings, and thoughts relative to this *sâdhana*.


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## III. Introductory Remarks

A large part of contemporary Yoga is concerned with the health benefits of Hatha-Yoga exercises and also Râja-Yoga meditation practices. While this approach must be criticized when it excludes Yoga's spiritual dimension, it is supported by a long-standing traditional connection between Yoga—and not mereley Hatha-Yoga!—and India's two native medical systems of Âyurveda and Siddha medicine. Admittedly, this association grew deeper with the emergence of Tantra and Hatha-Yoga in medieval times, but it existed long before then. This is only natural. If we can look upon Yoga as a form of *spiritual* healing that seeks to restore our psyche to original wholeness, we can regard medicine as being chiefly interested in the welfare or proper functioning of the conventional body-mind. The two purposes are clearly interlinked. In the case of India's two traditional systems, this interlinkage is much closer than it is between (spiritiual) Yoga and Western (materialistic) medicine.

Only relatively recently and by popular demand has there been a marked, if limited, change of attitude in Western medical circles, which has made it possible for alternative or complementary medicine to achieve a certain degree of recognition.

### Mental Health as Wholeness and Holiness: A Buddhist Perspective

According to the Abhidhamma, the Mind entails both wholesome and unwholesome factors. Unhealthy factors comprise delusion, wrong view, shamelessness, remorselessness, egotism, perplexity, anger, greed, aversion, envy, avarice, worry, contraction, and torpor. Healthy factors are the exact opposite of the former and are led by insight and mindfulness. We can replace unhealthy factors by cultivating healthy ones.

Insight consists in clear perception of the objective world as it really is, untainted by negative, unhealthy mental factors. Insight removes delusion. Mindfulness permits the *continuous* clear comprehension of the objective world, and it is an antidote to wrong view, that is, the incorrect apprehension of reality.

The presence in the mind of even a single unhealthy factor means that the mind is unhealthy, not whole, and also not holy. A healthy mind manifests only healthy factors. Such a mind is not only self-transcending but also impartial and yet compassionate toward all beings. A healthy, wholesome mind is holy. It tends toward ultimate enlightenment. Thus is the mind of an *arhat* or *bodhisattva.*


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# V. Yoga, Âyur-Veda, and Siddha Medicine
## (YT, pp. 78-82)

## Main Points

**1.** The beginnings of Indian medicine can be seen in the *Atharva-Veda,* and scattered medical references can even be found in the *Rig-Veda.* Among the Vedic deities, the Ashvins figured as the celestial physicians.

Nâgârjuna

**2.** India has two great medical traditions: Âyur-Veda and Siddha-Cikitsâ. The former, which is the better known tradition of the two, was developed largely within the Sanskrit-speaking community of the North, while the latter is almost completely the creation of the Tamil-speaking South. To these two systems, we must add Tibetan medicine (not discussed here), which regards the Buddha as the ultimate healer and enlightenment as the supreme healing.

**3.** Both medical traditions have much in common with Yoga, and Siddha medicine has significant ties with the South Indian tradition of the *siddhas* (highly accomplished, if not perfected, masters). In the course of its history, the latter also has included many alchemists, and thus Siddha-Cikitsâ is strong on remedies based on the healing properties of metals.

**4.** The philosophical basis of Âyur-Veda is Sâmkhya-Yoga and, in the case of the *Sushruta-Samhitâ,* Sâmkhya. Siddha medicine, by contrast, is largely founded on the metaphysics of Shaivism (discussed in Chapter 11 of YT).

**5.** Siddha medicine is traditionally said to have been invented or brought to South India by Sage Agastya, who also is associated with alchemy.

**6.** The two most important Sanskrit works on Âyur-Veda are the *Sushruta-Samhitâ* (containing a pre-Buddhist core) and the *Caraka-Samhitâ* (with a core dating back to the late epic era).


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## Outline

Âyur-Veda (often spelled Âyurveda) is known as one of the native Indian systems of medicine. Âyur-Veda means "Science of Life" or "Science of Longevity." Classical Âyur-Veda grew out of the practice of medicine during the early Vedic period. Over the centuries, it evolved into a specialized field of preventative, remedial, and rejuvenative care, which shares with Yoga many insights into the body-mind complex. As it is a vast science, we will examine only core principles and facts pertinent to the history and theory of Yoga. A detailed discussion of physiology and anatomy in Âyur-Veda and Yoga goes beyond the scope of this course.

It has sometimes been suggested that native Indian medicine was derived from or at least greatly influenced by ancient Greek medicine. Historical evidence, however, points to the reverse. There is no doubt that classical Âyur-Veda had its origins in the literature and practices of the Vedic period. Âyur-Veda is considered an *upânga* or *upaveda*, or an ancillary branch, of the *Atharva-Veda,* and some authorities exalt it as the "Fifth Veda" first taught by Dhanvantari.

When we look at the possibly earlier *Rig-Veda*, we find references to diseases and remedial actions, but of greater importance in understanding medicine during this early period is the *Atharva-Veda*. Atharva-Vedic hymns reveal the connection between medicine and the religious lives of the Indus-Sarasvati (Vedic) people. At least one hundred hymns deal with medical matters, including a list of herbal remedies as well as magical procedures. The *Atharva-Veda* mentions rites, fasting, *mantra*, oblations for auspiciousness, and disciplines for the relief of disease conditions.

The Vedic scriptures reveal largely a magico-religious approach to healing, which was closely aligned with rituals. The *Atharva-Veda* mentions sorcery and the malign influences of deities and spirits as recognized causes of disease. The Atharvan priests employed magic incantations, charms, and amulets to dispel negative forces inhibiting an individual's well-being, as well as offered oblations and prescribed penance. Caraka, one of the principal formulators of Classical Âyur-Veda also acknowledged these "subtle" causes of mental and physical disturbance. He, furthermore, noted that some diseases are the direct consequence of nonvirtuous deeds and recommended atonement as a suitable remedy. Vedic medicine, similar to shamanic forms of healing, took the mind fully into account in dealing with disease.

Classical Âyur-Veda took a more empirical-rational approach to healing. Sushruta, in his *Sushruta-Samhitâ* (1.1 and 1.24), mentions hereditary, congenital, humoral, and environmental factors of disease.

Caraka speaks of three main causes of disease: (1) acting outside of one's innate wisdom or discernment, (2) environmental disturbances, and (3) improper use of the senses. Even with the elaboration of treatment techniques and modalities in Classical Âyur-Veda (diagnosis, prognosis, therapy, purification, medical ethics, etc.), the Vedic roots of medicine were never forgotten.

Many of the ideas central to the classical paradigm of Indian medicine were already present in the Vedic scriptures. They were further developed through empirical investigation,


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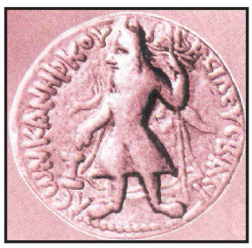
which began to dominate later medical science. It was not uncommon for Âyurvedic practitioners to dissect corpses, and in his medical treatise Caraka spends a whole chapter on the principles of debate. Formal debates became an important forum for physicians who were eager to refine and test their medical theories. In later times, a great corpus of knowledge needed to be memorized for which the formulations of texts in the aphoristic (*sûtra*) style were used. Commentaries were written on the medical texts, but the primary form of education was the oral tradition, which served as the format for proper Vedic study in general.

As with Yoga, Âyur-Veda was for a long time pursued as an initiatory discipline. The art of healing consists not only of theoretical and practical aspects of medical knowledge and expertise, but also of the intuitive wisdom that helps in facilitating a patient's recovery of health and wholeness. Age-old lineages, in many cases hereditary, have transmitted the wisdom of Âyur-Veda in the context of the *guru*-disciple relationship. Two main lineages can be traced:

Physician Âtreya and his six main disciples: Agnivesha, Bhela, Jatakarna, Pârâshara, Kshîrapâni, and Hârîta

- one extending from Indra to the seer Bharadvâja and then to Dhanvantari
- the other, according to Caraka, extending from Brahma to Prajâpati, the Ashvins, Indra, Bharadvâja, and then to Âtreya, who passed the teachings on to his six disciples. Interestingly, Âtreya is named in the Buddhist *Jâtakas* (containing tales about the Buddha) as the teacher of Jîvaka, who lived before the time of the Buddha.

The compilations of Sushruta, Caraka, and Vâgbhata are collectively known as *vriddha-trayî*, or "three elders" of Âyur-Veda, or *brihat-trayî* meaning "great trio." They remain to this day the key sources of Âyur-Vedic textual knowledge. Sushruta claims to have learned from Dhanvantari, while Caraka stemmed from the lineage of Âtreya. Vâgbhata the Elder (who may have been a Buddhist), again, depended on both Sushruta and Caraka and may have lived in the seventh century A.D. He composed the *Ashtânga-Hridaya-Samhitâ* and the *Ashtânga-Samgraha,* which are condensed versions of the latter works mentioned. Several subsequent texts were compiled in the following centuries, dealing with diagnostics and enumerating new diseases and remedies. (There was another Vâgbhata who also wrote on Âyur-Veda and lived c. 900 A.D.)



Kanishka on ancient coin

## Caraka

Caraka, the court physician of King Kanishka, most likely of the first or second century A.D. (though some Hindu traditionalists place him as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Caraka defined Ayur-Veda as the science of knowing the difference between a virtuous and happy life versus a harmful and miserable life. Only the person who lives a virtuous and happy life will be blessed with longevity. Caraka understood Âyur-Veda as a universal life science whose principles could and should be verified through empirical knowledge rather than accepted blindly from inherited tradition.

Dhanvantari, an emanation of God Vishnu, who, according to tradition, had six main disciples, including Sushruta

Caraka emphasized the cultivation of discernment (*prajnâ*), because the person who abides in innate wisdom does not perform acts that cause suffering but rather that lead to happiness. Caraka recommended a self-reflective life—a knowledgeable and harmonious way of being in the world. According to him, one ought to lead a life of balance in pursuit of the four core values of *dharma*, *artha*, *kâma*, and *moksha*. One should learn from one's mistakes, understand the underlying law of cause and effect, and proceed accordingly. The function of health was to promote a virtuous life under the inspiration of the greater ideal of liberation. The *Caraka-Samhitâ* (1.11.3) mentions the relative goals of Âyur-Veda as consisting of longevity, prosperity, and behavior conducive to a positive life circumstance or rebirth.

## Sushruta

Sushruta is the semilegendary authority behind the *Sushruta-Samhitâ,* which was originally called *Shalya-Tantra* and comprised only five chapters (mainly on surgery). This famous text was much later revised and expanded by Nâgârjuna (not to be confused with the Buddhist adept). Subsequent editors have made further changes and contributions. The present version of this text, which shows the influence of Îshvara Krishna's dualistic Sâmkhya philosophy, is a formidable textbook that has contributed a wealth of medical knowledge, including anatomy, surgery, and toxicology.

Sushruta shared with Caraka a similar notion of health. He regarded health as being based on (1) an equilibrium among the constituent somatic elements and (2) a harmony between the body-mind and the *âtman,* or transcendental Self. A good word to describe health is *integration*—the harmonious conjunction of body, mind, and Spirit.

## Connections Between Yoga and Âyur-Veda

Some practitioners of Âyur-Veda insist that Yoga and Âyur-Veda must be studied together, as an interdisciplinary approach to a complete, holistic life science. Indeed, the two sciences have much in common and are mutually compatible, but an intensive study of Âyur-Veda is meaningful only for Yoga practitioners who use Yoga for therapeutic purposes.

The first obvious link between Âyur-Veda and Yoga is their acceptance of similar


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metaphysical views. Both Classical Yoga and Âyur-Veda are founded on the *purusha-prakriti* (Nature/Spirit) dualism, though the general principles of Âyur-Veda are fluid enough to allow a number of metaphysical orientations, as can be seen in the closely related science of Tibetan medicine and Âyur-Veda as it developed in Sri Lanka. Caraka's authoritative work also presumes a microcosmic-macrocosmic schema of the individual in relation to the cosmos—an idea that is prominent within Hindu Yoga, especially Tantra-Yoga.

The foundational principle of Âyur-Veda and Yoga is consciousness, meaning the pure Awareness (*cit*) of the transcendental Self, or Spirit. Health (*svâsthya* or *ârogya*) in Âyur-Veda implies a state of harmony, a balance or integration of mind, body, and Spirit. Disease is the condition of being out of harmony. A basic concept of Classical Yoga is that if we are established in the transcendental Awareness, we eliminate the causes of suffering that result in physical and emotional illness. In a broad sense, Âyur-Veda and Yoga have as their focus the healing of human consciousness as manifested on all physical and mental levels of existence. Here we have space to explore only a few of the points at which these two traditions intersect.

As opposed to Cartesian dualism, which informs much of modern medicine, both Âyur-Veda and Yoga work with an interactive model of the body and mind. That is to say, they appreciate that disease can disturb the mind and that a disharmonious mind is a breeding ground for illness. This interactivity becomes more intelligible when we bear in mind the ancient model of the various "coverings" (*kosha*) first taught in the *Taittirîya-Upanishad* (YT, p. 132). This model proposes the existence of five sheaths or casings constituted of ever more subtle "matter." The physical body is the most dense casing and is subject to influences from the more subtle casings. In turn, the experiences harvested in the material realm via the physical body leave their traces in the subtler casings, thus creating a complex feedback mechanism. From

### The Eight Branches of Âyur-Veda

- *Kâya-cikitsâ*: therapeutics
- *Shâlâkya-tantra*: treatment of diseases of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, oral cavity, and throat
- *Shalya-pahartìka* (*Salya-tantra*): surgery
- *Visha-tantra*: toxicology
- *Bhûta-vidyâ*: psychiatric knowledge, including the influence from spirits
- *Kaumâra-bhritya*: pediatrics
- *Rasâyana*: rejuvenation
- *Vâji-karana*: virilization

### The Caraka-Samhitâ

The *Caraka-Samhitâ,* containing both prose and verse, is divided into eight parts (*sthâna*) and has a total of 120 chapters as follows:

- *Sûtra-sthâna* (30 chapters) deals with general principles, philosophy, etc.
- *Nidâna-sthâna* (8 chapters) deals with causes of disease
- *Vimâna-sthâna* (8 chapters) deals with taste, nourishment, general pathology, etc.
- *Sharîra-sthâna* (8 chapters) deals with anatomy and embryology
- *Indriya-sthâna* (12 chapters) deals with diagnosis and prognosis
- *Cikitsâ-sthâna* (30 chapters) deals with treatment of diseases
- *Kalpa-sthâna* (12 chapters) deals with pharmacy
- *Siddhi-sthâna* (12 chapters) deals with cure of diseases


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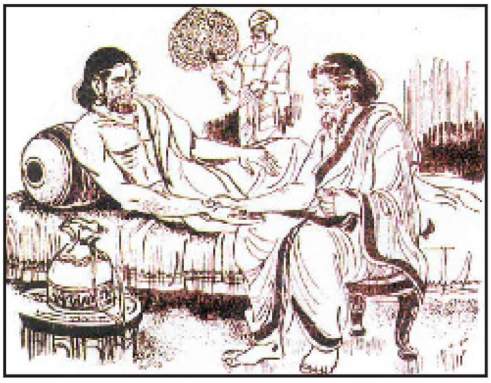
the perspective of Âyur-Veda and the therapeutic side of Yoga, disturbance at any of these levels integrally affects all others.



Caraka examining patient

*The Yoga Tradition* (p. 81) mentions the yogic science of *svarodaya*, or breathwork, and points out the important role of controlling the life energy (*prâna*) in the maintenance of physical and mental health as well as in the pursuit of liberation. Many, if not most, yogic texts address the centrality of working with the breath. From the model of the five "sheaths" (*kosha*) it becomes clear that *prâna* is the interface between body and mind.

Âyur-Veda, Classical Yoga, and Tantra (including Hatha-Yoga) approach the experience of embodiment differently. They do, however, have similar views on anatomy, physiology (including *marmans* and *nâdîs*, see YT, p.79), metabolism, and the dynamics of subtle energy transformation (*prâna, tejas,* and *ojas*). Caraka agrees with the Pre-Classical/Upanishadic notion of the heart as the seat of consciousness, and Yoga and Âyur-Veda both accept the twin notions of *karma* and rebirth. They also share the concept of the three primary constituents of Nature (*prakriti*)—the *gunas*—and their play on body and mind. *Sattva-guna* (the quality of lucidity) is the basis for good health, as it builds *ojas* (vital energy) and maintains stability in the body. The increase of *sattva* is also fundamental to the yogic process, which can be viewed as one of progressive *sattvification*.

The microcosmic/macrocosmic schema that is utilized by Caraka and that also is pervasive in Yoga comprises the following notions:

- What is external is internal. The principles of Nature, or matter in all its developments and dimensions, exist in a similar fashion in the makeup of our human individuality. Thus we can learn from Nature and must abide by its governing rules.
- The actions one performs bear a direct consequence on the rest of the organic world or cosmos and thus one should live in a conscientious manner. Caraka's explanation of the causes of disease includes the individual's relationship to the environment, underscoring the connection between ethical living and physical and emotional well-being. We have a multidimensional existence (see the *panca-kosha* model), which implies that we are integrally related to a vast number of organic and inorganic systems that are mutually interconnected. What we do in our lives significantly affects not only ourselves but also other living beings. This ties in with the Vedic notions of the cosmic order (*rita*), *karma*, and social responsibility (*dharma*). The counterpoint to these ideas is the constant endeavor in Yoga to transcend *karma* and space-time and achieve immortality. In Tantra, as we will see in Part V, this endeavor took *yogins* in a novel direction: the aspiration to create a deathless body of light that is no longer subject to the laws of Nature. The Âyur-Vedic version of this is the attempt to achieve longevity by various means, notably *kâya-kalpa* (see YT, p.81).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This brings us to alchemy, which has had a long association with Yoga, starting in the Vedic era. Yoga is internalized alchemy: turning the body (lead) into gold (illumination) with the aid of the mind (mercury/quicksilver).

### Alchemy

> Alchemy is the prescientific craft of using natural elements to produce seemingly supernatural results, notably physical immortality. Whether in China, India, or Europe, the alchemists sought after the elixir of life, the philosopher's stone, that would outwit Nature's law of entropy. In India, this elixir is known as *rasa* ("taste" or "essence"), and alchemy is called *rasa-âyana* ("way of the elixir"), or *dhâtu-vâda* ("doctrine of the basic element"). From the reports of such seasoned travelers as al-Bîrûnî and Marco Polo, we learn that Indian *yogins* have also practiced alchemy. Indeed, Yoga is a form of alchemy, since it aims at the transmutation of human consciousness and—in Tantra and Hatha-Yoga—even at the transubstantiation of the body.
>
> —**Georg Feuerstein**, *Encyclopedia of Yoga and Tantra*, p. 17

Indian alchemy exceeds Âyur-Veda's goal of well-being and longevity. It seeks not only to cure disease but to conquer mortality through a radical transformation of body and mind. Thus, Hindu alchemy takes its bearings from metaphysics, notably Tantra.

The external process of transmuting mineral and metal substances, as achieved in the laboratory of the alchemist, has often been symbolic of inner, spiritual work. Not all alchemists, however, have had the profound capacity to transform the body-mind through contemplative yogic techniques, and so they preoccupied themselves with

### Yogins, Healers, Alchemists

It is in the *Atharva-Veda* in particular that we find the most important foundations for the later medical and alchemical traditions, which sought to extend (indefinitely) the life span of human beings. Indeed, it is in this text that one finds the greatest preponderance of healing hymns involving health. At the center of this practice stood the healer (*bhishaj*) who was also a possessed "shaker" (*vipra*) and an inspired master of incantation (*kavi*). Part physician, part shaman, part sorcerer, the *atharvan* priest was viewed as both powerful and dangerous by Vedic society. For this very reason, perhaps, his heir, the itinerant Ayurvedic physician (*carana-vaidya*) was also regarded with suspicion by "good" brahmanic society.

—**David Gordon White,** *The Alchemical Body,* p.13


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Kamil V. Zvelebil

manipulating the elements externally in the hope of producing gold from lead. The internal alchemical quest was more concerned with the "philosopher's stone"—the supreme condition of enlightenment.

The *siddhas* (*sitthars*) of Tamil Nadu (i.e., South India) developed a strong interest in merging alchemy with medicine, and they amassed invaluable knowledge in treating disease with inorganic substances. At the same time, they created a unique form of Tantra-Yoga, which found its most sublime expression in the *Tiru-Mantiram* of Tirumûlar. The Siddha tradition of medicine (*citta-vaittiyam*) can be traced to Sage Agastya and is a part of an esoteric oral tradition that is still alive today. There are numerous alchemical and medical texts composed in the Tamil language, which remain fairly inaccessible, though Babaji's Kriya Yoga Order of Acharyas in Canada is currently locating, scanning, and translating the still extant manuscripts to salvage them for posterity.

The Siddha tradition of South India has many ideas and practices in common with Âyur-Veda, though it has its own distinct body of knowledge, especially in terms of the use of metals and minerals in the preparation of medicinal concoctions. Among these remedies for internal use is the alchemical component mercury, which was not used in Âyur-Veda until Vâgbhata's *Ashtânga-Samgraha*. Yogic postures, breathwork, and mantric recitation (*mantra-japa*) also are an integral part of the Siddha tradition of medicine.

The renowned Tamil scholar Kamil V. Zvelebil, in his book *The Siddha Quest for Immortality,* mentions the following key ideas or tenets of Siddha medicine:

- The human being is considered to be a reflection of the cosmos at large. Zvelebil quotes the semilegendary *siddha* Cattaimuni as saying that "the body exists within the universe; the universe and the body are one; the universe exists within the body." This macrocosmic-microcosmic parallelism, for instance, entails that the zodiacal and planetary energies can also be mapped in the body.

- The human body-mind is a manifestation of, and contains within itself, the 96 principles (*tattva*) taught in Shaiva-Siddhânta, which is the philosophical home of the Siddhas. (These 96 principles are an elaboration of the 24 principles or categories of existence known to Sâmkhya.)

- The body is constituted of five material elements: earth, water, fire, air, and ether. The adept (*siddha*) who understands and masters the operation of the five elements is in fact capable of alchemical feats that strike others as miraculous.


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• Disease is caused by an imbalance of the three humors (Sanskrit: *tri-dosha*; Tamil: *muppini*)—wind, bile, and phlegm—that are constituents of the body.

The same tenets can be found also in the Âyur-Veda of Northern India, though Âyur-Veda, as we noted before, resorts to the cosmology of Sâmkhya rather than Shaiva-Siddhânta. For more information on Siddha alchemy, please read *The Yoga Tradition*, Chapter 18, pp. 383-384. Also relevant are the topics of Tantra and Hatha-Yoga dealt with in Chapters 17 and 18 of that book.

Dr. Vasant Lad

The Âyur-Vedic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico, was established by Dr. Vasant Lad in 1984. It is one of the leading Âyur-Veda schools and Âyur-Vedic health centers outside of India, and offers a 3,400-hour training program running over four years.

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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #39**

# The Yogic Art of Healing

## by Georg Feuerstein

The purpose of Yoga and other liberation teachings is to bring about the ultimate "cure" of enlightenment, which ends all suffering. There may still be the experience of physical pain—if you stub your toe, it will hurt—but the enlightened adept no longer suffers, because he or she has realized the transcendental Self, or Spirit, which permanently lifts one out of the fateful identificaction with the body and the mind. The accomplished *yogin* also can, by an act of will, control the sensation of pain, so that there is none.

As we know from Patanjali's *Yoga-Sûtra* (1.30), disease (*vyâdhi*) is one of the impediments to a successful Yoga practice. Therefore it is desirable to do whatever is necessary to re-establish the body's health. Naturopathic medicine commends itself both for its curative power and its


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gentleness. Often modern allopathic does more harm than good. Sometimes the so-called "side effects" of chemically based remedies do not manifest until much later, and generally neither patients nor physicians make the connection. Thus, the illusion of allopathic medicine's great success can be maintained. In India, people trust the naturopathic approach of Âyurveda and Siddha-Cikitsâ, which have proven their validity and efficacy for countless generations. In Western countries, herbal medicine and homeopathy are constantly struggling against suppression by the orthodox medical establishment and the chemical-pharmaceutical industry. Yet, the growing popularity of so-called alternative and complementary medical approaches suggests that people find them more congenial.

Since ill-health is to be expected in life, Yoga understandably has from the beginning been associated with healing and the healing science of Âyurveda. Yoga, especially in its Tantric variation (e.g., as Laya-Yoga, Siddha-Yoga, or Hatha-Yoga) also has developed many diverse techniques of its own for preventing and healing physical diseases.

For instance, when describing the postures (*âsana*) and seals (*mudrâ*), the *Hatha-Yoga-Pradîpikâ*—the most popular traditional manual of Hatha-Yoga—typically mentions the therapeutic benefits of the various techniques. Thus, the famous lotus posture (*padma-âsana*) is said (hyperbolically) not only to cure all diseases but also to lead to the supreme goal of liberation (2.33). The technique of *neti* is said to not only cleanse the frontal sinuses but also remove a host of diseases and even generate "divine sight" (*divya-drishti*) (3.18). Breath control (*prânâyâma*), again, is praised as a means of "drying up" all physical impurities and of attaining a joyous state (4.7), as well as removing one's sins (4.9).

Modern Hatha-Yoga manuals, notably Sri B. K. S. Iyengar's classic book *Light on Yoga*, similarly list the therapeutic effects of the diverse postures. The claims made are largely based on the preceding traditional literature but are arguably often correct. The therapeutic properties of the postures have apparently not been researched as extensively as have the health benefits of yogic meditation (primarily in the form of Transcendental Meditation, as taught by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1917-2008).

As acknowledged in the extensive traditional literature on yogic practice, the various psychosomatic exercises, which are usually grouped under the label "Hatha-Yoga," are all an integral part of Yoga's spiritual heritage. In other words, they do not contradict the core orientation of all authentic Yoga, which is ultimate freedom from egoism (and egotism!) and suffering. On the contrary, they are thought to support the spiritual path by harmonizing, vitalizing, and strenghtening the body and the mind.

While the purpose of Yoga is to eradicate suffering, it is widely held that as long as one is still struggling to attain Self-realization, or enlightenment, suffering has its place. As the renowned Swami Sivananda (1887–1963) stated:

There can be no strength without suffering. There can be no success without


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> suffering. Without sorrows, without persecution, none can become a saint or a sage. Every sufferng is meant for one's uplift and development.
>
> Suffering augments the power of endurance, mercy, faith in God and removes egoism. Calamity is a blessing in disguise to instil power of endurance and mercy in the heart and turn the mind towards God. . .
>
> Every difficulty that comes in the spiritual path is an opportunity to grow stronger and stronger and to develop our will. He who knows how to suffer, enjoys much peace. (pp. 662–663)

That is to say, the person who knows how to correctly relate to the difficulties of life, converts mere passive suffering into a unique opportunity to utilize the energy behind disappointment, frustration, or pain as an evolutionary lever. Instead of allowing the mind to pour its plentiful energy into unproductive states like anger, regret, anxiety, or depression, we can and should create a momentum that will gradually take us toward liberation.

The authorities of traditional Yoga have long recognized that incorrect yogic practice can give rise to various diseases, notably diseases of the nervous system. The classical Hatha-Yoga manuals warn practitioners that faulty application of some of the prescribed exercises, especially breath control, can cause ill health. There is a little known corpus of Sanskrit texts dedicated to curing "yogic" diseases, such as the eighteenth-century work entitled *Satkarma-Samgraha* ("Compendium on the Correct [Remedial] Actions") by Cidghanânanda Nâtha and the rare *Mahâkâla-Jaya-Shâstra* ("Textbook on the Victory over Great Time [Death]) ascribed to Âdinatha (or Shiva) himself. Only one chapter of this extensive work seems to have been located carrying the title *Mahâkâla-Yoga-Shâstra-Khecarî-Vidyâ* (The Science of "Space-Walking" of the Yoga Textbook on Death"). The term "space-walking" (*khecarî*) has at least three levels of interpretation: First, it denotes the paranormal ability to actually walk in air; second, it stands for the Hatha-Yoga technique of turning the tongue back toward the uvula; third, it signifies an advanced meditative state in which one's consciousness pours out into the infinite space of ultimate Awareness.

Diseases caused in the Yoga practitioner, according to Cidghanânanda Nâtha's text (verse 6), may involve carelessness (*pramâda*) relative to nonobservation of the proper indications or the contraindications or relative to improper place or time, or they may involve "divine" obstacles (*daiva-vighna*), which we can interpret as unfortunate accidents. If these diseases cannot be warded off by means of postures or "divine" remedies (presumably alchemical potions), then the practitioner should use the so-called "divine" (i.e., extraordinary) methods. These cleanse the system of subtle channels (*nâdî*), which combined with control of the senses, in turn, remove afflicting diseases. This prescription suggests further yogic processes, particularly physical purification, as are also mentioned in the *Gheranda-Samhitâ*. But Cidghanânanda Nâtha's list of suggested techniques is more comprehensive. His recommendations include bloodletting, sweating, incensing, massage, and the use of antimony for eye ailments.


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An extremely valuable text is the *Yukta-Bhavadeva,* which was composed in 1623 by the erudite brahmin Bhavadeva Mishra. This work's title refers not to the author but to God Vishnu, who is also known as Bhavadeva. While the opening chapter of this text refers to the therapeutic value of certain breathing techniques, rejuvenation treatments are discussed in more detail in the second chapter.

Here a number of plants are mentioned in connection with herbal treatments, notably the *îshvarî or nâga-damanî* (heliotropium indicum), *brahma-vriksha* (butea frondosa), *mayûra-shikhâ* (actiniopteris dichotoma), *jyotishmatî* (celastrus paniculatus), *ashva-gandha* (withania somnifera), *pâthâ* (stephania hernandifolia), *kâka-janghâ* (abreus ptecatorius), *soma-râjî* (vernonia anthelminthica), *ushnodaka* (hot water containing dissolved chick peas), *shvetârka* (calotropis gigantia), *shrî-phala* (aegle marmelos), *rudantî* (alhagi maurorum), and *mundî* (sphaerantus hirtus). Bhavadeva Mishra gives fairly precise instructions for mixing each herbal concoction, which, he advises, should be done under the guidance of one's *guru*.

The third chapter deals with the structures of the physical and the subtle body. Bhavadeva refers to the qualities of the five material elements (the so-called *mahâ-bhûtas*), the development of the foetus, the various components parts of the physical body (such as the seven layers of the skin, the seven sets of connective tissues, the nine orifices, the 360 skeletal parts, the 210 joints, 500 muscles, the 107 vital points or *marmans,* and so on). He also briefly describes the movement of consciousness (*jîva*), the nature of the subtle channels and their location, as well as the six psychoenergetic centers (*cakra*).

The fourth chapter focuses on the moral virtues of Yoga, while the fifth chapter deals with the restraints (*niyama*). Posture and breath control are addressed in chapters five and six respectively, and the higher practices of the eightfold path of Yoga are explained in the remaining four chapters.

Clearly, for Bhavadeva Mishra, Hatha-Yoga and Âyurveda form an integrated approach, ensuring purification of body and mind, physical and mental health and vitality, as well as mental clarity, which is a precondition for the attainment of spiritual liberation.

Another seventeenth-to-eighteenth-century authority on Yoga and Âyurveda is Sundaradeva, who wrote several works, notably the *Hatha-Tattva-Kaumudî* ("Light on the Principles of Hatha-[Yoga]") and the *Hatha-Sanketa-Candrikâ* ("Moonlight on the Conventions of Hatha-[Yoga]"). His body of work also includes various literary compositions and a work on dietetics.

Born in South India into a brahmin family, Sundaradeva moved to the sacred city of Vârânâsî (Benares), where he very probably worked as a physician. His teacher was Vishvarûpa, a well-known spiritual figure of his era, and it is clear from all sorts of references in his Sanskrit writings that he had been initiated into the esoteric teachings of Yoga.


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The *Hatha-Tattva-Kaumudî* appears to be the essence of a much larger work authored by Sundaradeva—the *Yoga-Hridaya* ("Heart of Yoga"), which has not yet been translated. The former text devotes an entire chapter (4) to yogic diet, which ought to be moderate. Chapter 8 describes a number of purificatory techniques, while chapters 9-12 are dedicated to breath control. In Chapter 21, Sundaradeva describes two rejuvenation treatments (*kalpa*) and pays much attention to subtle anatomy in succeeding chapters.

A discussion of the cleansing of the subtle channels in Chapter 34 is followed by several chapters dealing with breath control once again, which shows the yogic and therapeutic importance of this "limb" of Yoga. While the eight purification practices grouped under *ashta-karma* address the impurities of the physical body, *nâdî-shuddhi* is concerned with the purification of the subtle channels in preparation of deep breath control and the higher yogic practices.

**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #40**

## Yogic Alchemy

by Georg Feuerstein

There are many ways of looking at Yoga. One of them is to see it as spiritual alchemy. How is Yoga a kind of alchemy? In the words of historian of religion Mircea Eliade, "[l]ike the alchemist, the yogin effects transformations in 'substance'" (p. 274). That is to say, like the alchemist, the yogin works with matter, which he seeks to transmute or refine.

The alchemical aspect of Yoga became particularly pronounced in many schools of Tantra, especially Hatha-Yoga, which aspired to create the "perfected body" (*siddha-deha*), or "divine body" (*divya-deha*) corresponding to the gnostic Christian and alchemical notion of the "body of glory."

In his important monograph on Yoga, Eliade further notes: "The unity between Yoga and alchemy was felt not only by the first foreign travelers to India, but also by the Indian people, who soon elaborated a whole yogico-alchemical folklore by incorporating the themes of the elixir of


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immortality and the transmutation of metals into the mytholgoy of the yogin-magician." (p. 275)

In the Tantric Siddha tradition of South India, there is a close relationship between spirituality and Siddha medicine, which includes a surfeit of alchemical ideas and practices. This subject has thus far been little explored, but the translation efforts of the Yoga Siddha Research Project in Chennai, which was founded by Marshall Govindan and is headed by Prof. T. N. Ganapathy. Among other things, T. N. Ganapathy and his team are preparing a new translation of the writings of Tirumûlar (Tamil), specifically his voluminous *Tiru-Mantiram* composed in difficult, symbolic Tamil, and they have already released several volumes of the work of the long-lived Bhoganâtha (Tamil: Boganâthar), a root guru of the legendary "Babaji."

Bhoganâtha is in many ways typical of the Tantric approach where we find both metaphorical and literal interpretations of the age-old notion of immortality. Thus, the Vedântic ideal of liberation while yet embodied (*jîvan-mukti*) is also interpreted in the sense of extreme longevity. The nectar of immortality is understood not only as a symbol but a literal substance that alters the chemistry of the physical body. A *siddha,* or perfected adept, knows how to utilize light, sound, and medical concoctions to "spiritualize" the corruptible body, so that it not only can withstand the "fire" of spiritual disciplines but also transcend the karmic law.

Needless to say, perfection is a distant goal, and many practitioners of Tantra, even of the South Indian Siddha branch, cannot be said to have attained the sublime aim of complete liberation from the fetters of the world of change (*samsâra*). For instance, members of the so-called Kâya-Siddha sect pursue the ideal of physical "perfection" rather than liberation, while members of the Rasavâda-Siddha sect specialize in alchemy and medicine.

Bhoganâtha, who was a true master, does not readily fit into any category but showed mastery of the techniques and accomplishments of many Tantric branches. His poetic works *Janana-Sâgaram* ("Ocean of Generation") and *Sapta-Kândam* ("Seven Parts"), which totals 7000 verses, cannot be understood without a thorough grasp of the symbolism and practice of Tantra. In the final analysis, only another Siddha can unlock the innermost secrets of such works.

For the practitioner of Tantra, the body-mind is the alchemical cauldron. Here base matter is transmuted into gold (spiritual freedom) by means of mercury (the mind). The Western hermetic tradition often depicted mercury in the form of a serpent—perhaps a concealed reference to the *kundalinî* power of the mind.

In his poem *Jnâna-Pûja-Vidi* (verse 11), Bhoganâtha explains that when "the oozing" occurs—that is, when the nectar of immortality, the "honey," manifests as a result of the awakened "serpent power"—the adept experiences sheer delight and realizes all the various paranormal powers (*siddhi;* Tamil: *citti*). The nectar of immortality is released from the crown center (*sahasrâra-cakra*) when the "serpent power" (*kundalinî-shakti*) has fully ascended from the basal center (at the bottom of the spine). It then "drips" into the "command center" (*âjnâ-cakra*) in the center of the head where it dissolves all cognitive (mental) distinctions. At this point, time stands still, aging and disease are conquered, karma is overcome, and eternal liberation is realized.


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# FOR REFLECTION

1. *Grounding:* In his *Yoga-Sûtra* (1.30), Patanjali names several obstacles (*antarâya*) on the path of Yoga, including sickness (*vyâdhi*). When we are ill, we find it difficult, if not impossible, to focus our attention on the spiritual process. Maintaining or restoring one's health is therefore very important. The masters of Yoga have always appreciated this fact, which is why they tend to furnish their disciples with practical guidelines for balanced living. Such guidelines can also be found in Âyur-Veda and Siddha medicine, and a study of these two leading medical traditions native to India can prove very helpful in grounding your Yoga practice. As Tantra reminds us, the body is the ground on which we conduct the great experiment of spiritual transformation. Please consider to what degree your own life and practice are grounded. Do you tend to take care of others more than yourself? Do you prefer to take care of the mind (studying, reading, etc.) more than the body (proper diet, exercise, etc.)?

2. *Bodily Purification:* Tantra celebrates the body as a temple of the Spirit. The eight limbs of Classical Yoga (see YT, pp. 244-254) can be looked upon as an extensive program of self-purification. Through the five moral disciplines (*yama*), we purify our social relationships. By means of the five practices of self-restraint (*niyama*), we purify our will and our relationship to a higher Reality (viz. Self, God, Goddess, etc.). Through posture practice and the cleansing techniques (*shauca*) of Hatha-Yoga (see YT, p. 391), we purify the body. Âyur-Veda also has various purificatory methods such as *panca-karma* ("five actions") therapy, which is becoming popular among Western *yogins* and *yoginîs*. What measures do you take to ensure inner and outer cleanliness? (It might help you in your consideration to actually compile a list.)

3. *Diet:* In considering health and purity, we must not forget diet, which since Vedic times has been appreciated as an important factor in spiritual growth. As the *Taittirîya-Upanishad* (2.21) declares:

> From food, verily, creatures are produced—whatsoever [creatures] dwell on earth. Moreover, by food, in truth, they live, and into it they finally pass."

In the case of *yogins* and *yoginîs*, whose physical system has become finely


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FOR REFLECTION ctd.

balanced, the right diet is essential. Here Âyur-Veda has a significant contribution to make, especially in terms of a practitioner's individual constitution. Yoga has long benefited from Âyur-Vedic lore and, in turn, very likely has contributed to Âyur-Veda's fund of knowledge. In addition to nutritional considerations, *yogins* must be mindful of the ethical implications of food consumption. Thus food must be gathered by nonviolent means (*ahimsâ*), and it also should not be hoarded or influence the practitioner's mind in negative ways. In other words, food should be nourishing and be consumed in the proper amount and at the right time. Thus, the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (17.17-19) discusses the psychosomatic effect of food in terms of its predominant *guna,* that is, whether food is pure (*sâttvika*), stimulating (*râjasika*), or heavy (*tâmasika*). By examining our choices in diet we are readily put in touch with the forces at play in our life. We are reminded here of the well-known saying by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach: "You are what you eat." Do you agree with him? If so, why? If not, why not?

4. *Work:* The *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (YT, pp. 187-196) tells us that so long as we are alive, we are compelled to be active. Even a contemplative is active—inwardly. And certainly our body is never inactive, because the heart is pumping blood, the lungs are sucking in and expelling air, the nerves are firing, the kidneys are filtering liquids, and so on. The question, then, is *how* should we be active? The consensus of Yoga masters is that we should engage all actions mindfully, attentively, so that we avoid falling under the spell of our unconscious (karmic) patterns. Most Yoga authorities, furthermore, ask us to regulate our actions along sound moral principles. That is to say, we are advised to practice kindness, compassion, generosity, patience, and many more virtues for the benefit of others. Our work should be ego-transcending service. What better service could there be than that of healing?

Yet, oddly, the practice of medicine was not highly regarded during the Vedic period. Some scholars propose that orthodox *brahmins*, who were preoccupied with ritual purity, avoided the medical profession because it entailed association with "impure" disease. Caraka, who wished to elevate the status of physicians, regarded medicine as a high form of work and service. For him, the practice of medicine was a compassionate act requiring an incredible degree of integrity. The medical practitioner, according to Caraka, performs this work as service in order to alleviate suffering. It is on this point that Âyur-Veda and Yoga meet most essentially.

5. *Daily regime* (*dina-âcâra*)*:* One of the most practical themes in Âyur-Veda is that of a daily regimen. This involves all the basic daily rituals by which we maintain our well-being. Consider the life-style practices you presently uphold and reflect on whether your patterns of sleep, eating, cleanliness, meditation, etc. are erratic or fixed. Are they a strong pillar or foundation allowing you to function at your best; are they flexible or rigid?


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# QUESTIONNAIRE #10

Please SUBMIT this questionnaire to TYS: tyslearning@sasktel.net
Don't forget to include your full name, email address, date, and course title. Please refer to our instructions on p. 17.

**1. According to Buddhism, which of the following best characterizes mindfulness?** *(Check one)*

(a) pure nonjudgmental awareness
(b) correct comprehension of reality
(c) thought-free attentiveness

**2. Where did Indian medicine have its beginnings?** *(Check one)*

(a) the *Vedas*
(b) the *Brâhmanas*
(c) the *Upanishads*
(d) *Sushruta-Samhitâ*

**3. Who was the first teacher of Âyur-Veda?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) Indra
(b) Brahma
(c) Sushruta
(d) Âtreya
(e) Dhanvantara
(f) Caraka

**4. Who of the following are considered the "three elders" of Âyur-Veda?** *(Check three)*

(a) Âtreya
(b) Sushruta
(c) Caraka
(d) the Ashvins
(e) Vâgbhata
(f) Agnivesha


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**5. What is the philosophical basis of Âyur-Veda?** *(Check one)*

(a) Vedânta
(b) Jnâna-Yoga
(c) Sâmkhya
(d) Vaisheshika
(e) Buddhism
(f) Jainism

**6. What is the philosophical basis of Tamil Siddha medicine?** *(Check one)*

(a) Vedânta
(b) Sâmkhya
(c) Shaiva Siddhânta
(d) Kaula Tantra

**7. According to Caraka, where is consciousness located?** *(Check one)*

(a) brain
(b) head
(c) whole body
(d) heart
(e) solar plexus

**8. What is the primary purpose of *kaya-kalpa*?** *(Check one)*

(a) fitness
(b) rejuvenation
(c) purification
(d) longevity

**9. What is meant by *vyâdhi*?** *(Check one)*

(a) impurity
(b) imbalance
(c) disease
(d) depression

**10. What is meant by *nâdî-shuddhi*?** *(Check one)*

(a) physical purification
(b) bloodletting
(c) purification of the subtle channels


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**11. How many subtle vital points are recognized in Ayur-Veda and Yoga?** *(Check one*)

(a) 96
(b) 107
(c) 108

**12. In Hatha-Yoga, which of the following is the main cause of the nectar of immortality to manifest?** *(Check one*)

(a) bodily purification
(b) meditative visualization
(c) full awakening of the *kundalinî*
(d) *nâdi-shuddhi*

**13. Who is Bhoganâtha?** *(Check one or more*)

(a) founder of Shaiva Siddhânta
(b) founder of the South Indian Siddha school of Tantra
(c) author of the *Tiru-Mantiram*
(d) author of the *Sapta-Kândam*
(e) a Siddha

**14. Which of the following is correct?** *(Check one*)

(a) diet is given little attention in Yoga but it is considered very important in Âyur-Veda
(b) diet is important in Yoga but only deemed moderately important in Âyur-Veda
(c) diet is deemed important in both Yoga and Âyur-Veda
(d) diet is of marginal importance in both Yoga and Âyur-Veda

**15. Who is Tirumûlar?** *(Check one or more*)

(a) a Tamil Siddha
(b) a North Indian Tantric adept
(c) author of the *Tiru-Mantiram*
(d) author of the *Kshurikâ-Upanishad*
(e) a North Indian master of Hatha-Yoga

**16. In which part of India is the Siddha-Cikitsa system prominent?** *(Check one*)

(a) South India
(b) Central India
(c) Northern India


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**17. Which of the following statements about Cidghanânanda Nâtha is correct?** *(Check one*)

(a) he was an alchemist
(b) he wrote a book on Shaiva Siddhânta
(c) he was a direct disciple of Tirumûlar
(d) he wrote a treatise on Hatha-Yoga

**18. Which Hatha-Yoga technique is said to bestow "divine sight"?** *(Check one*)

(a) *padma-âsana*
(b) *nâdi-shodhana*
(c) neti
(d) nauli

**19. Who is also known as Âdinâtha?**

(a) Goraksha
(b) Matsyendra
(c) Tirumûlar
(d) Vishnu
(e) Shiva
(f) Krishna


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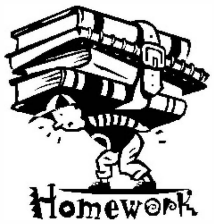
# LESSON 11

## I. Objectives

This lesson has the following two objectives:

- to further map out the Hindu religious context within which Yoga has evolved
- in particular to acquaint you more deeply with some of the major male and female deities of Hinduism

## II. Homework Assignments




- **Read** section VI of Chapter 3 in *The Yoga Tradition* book (pp. 83–88).
- **Read** all materials of Lesson 11 in this Study Guide, including Additional Study Materials #41–43.
- **Ponder** the questions under "For Reflection" and jot down your significant thoughts.
- **Answer Questionnaire #11 and submit.**
- **Practical Assignment:** There is NO practical assignment for this lesson other than the counsel henceforth to be patient and kind under all circumstances.
- **Answer the Questionnaire #12 and submit.**
- **Write the Final Essay and submit**. Make sure that the essay topic has first been approved by your tutor.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## III. Introductory Remarks

This is the final lesson of the present course, and we have deliberately kept the materials down to a minimum to allow you to answer the additional questionnaire and write the concluding essay on which your "academic" performance will be assessed.

Lesson 10 deals with some of the religious aspects of Hinduism with which Yoga has become associated in the course of its protracted development in India; hence Hindu Yoga. As we have seen there are also Buddhist and Jaina forms of Yoga, which show a preeminent doctrinal "coloring" from the traditions of Buddhism and Jainism respectively.

Western Yoga practitioners are primarily exposed to the Hindu variety of Yoga, while Western practitioners of Buddhism and Jainism generally do not think of their paths to liberation as types of Yoga. This is slowly changing in Western Buddhist circles due to the vigorous teachings of many prominent Tibetan lamas. Tibetan Buddhism, or Vajrayana, is a form of Tantra in which Yoga concepts and practices are central. The highest level of Vajrayana practice is known as "Unexcelled Yoga," or *anuttara-yoga*.

For students who are adhering to Christianity while studying, or engaging in, Yoga, we have included the essay "The Yoga of Jesus" as Additional Study Materials #43 in the hope that this essay can serve as a bridge between these two Eastern traditions. **Those who are totally committed to inherited Christian views and do not care to inspect them may ignore this particular reading** on which no questions in the relevant Questionnaire will be based.


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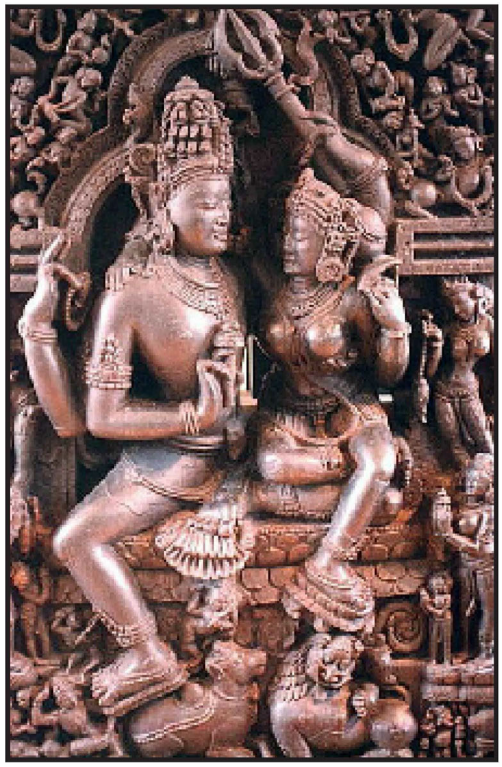
# VI. Yoga and Hindu Religion
## (YT, pp. 83-88)

## Overview

Although Yoga is not a religion, but rather as the Hindus see it, a "perennial spiritual teaching" (*sanâtana-dharma*), it is closely aligned with the cosmologies and religious beliefs of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina cultural traditions. This section briefly introduces some of the principal deities of Hinduism, which is the main focus of *The Yoga Tradition* book.



God and Goddess,
a common motif of Hinduism

## Main Points

**1.** Yoga is spiritual practice, but such practice has always been embedded in a particular culture and belief system (whether it be a religion or a philosophy).

**2.** The male and female deities (*devatâ*) of the various pantheons are worshiped as manifestations of the ultimate Reality (call it the Divine, the supreme Being, etc.). Seen with the eyes of the practitioner, these deities *are* the supreme Being. For instance, practitioners of Shaiva Yoga regard Shiva as the supreme, formless Singularity but relate devotionally to his personal characteristics (the archetypal *yogin* who resides at the peak of Mount Kailâsa, is married to Pârvatî, wears a tiger skin, has a serpent wrapped around his neck, etc.). This personalized form of Shiva is simply a *manifestation* of the unqualified (*nirguna*) Reality. Most practitioners of Vaishnavism, by contrast, regard Vishnu in his "qualified" (*saguna*) form as the supreme Being and see all other deities as either manifestations of Vishnu or lesser beings (corresponding to the angels of the Judeo-Christian tradition). The deities of popular Hinduism today are not the same that were prominently in the early Vedic era. The Vedic pantheon receded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as the teachings of the *Purânas, Âgamas,* and *Tantras* gained in influence.

Ganesha in *lalita-âsana*

**3.** The highly symbolic language of the Vedic seers and sages has been virtually forgotten and at the hands of modern scholars has suffered much misinterpretation. Consequently our understanding of the *Vedas* and the Vedic pantheon is lacking. The interpretative work of the great Yoga adept Sri Aurobindo (see YT, pp. 55-58) has been instrumental in recovering at least some of the lost symbolism.

**4.** The most popular deities of Hinduism are Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Kâlî/Durgâ, Ganesha, and Skanda. Each deity has a long and intricate history, which often is only inadequately known. Also, each deity is the focal point of a religious-spiritual culture of varying size and historical significance. The three most important such cultures are Shaivism (focusing on Shiva), Vaishnavism (focusing on Vishnu and his various manifestations, notably Krishna), and Shaktism (focusing on the Divine in its feminine aspect, often as Kâlî). The first two religious-spiritual cultures or traditions are discussed in *The Yoga Tradition,* Chapters 11 and 12. Shaktism, though a cultural-religious strand in its own right, is largely dealt with under Tantra in Chapter 17 and also in the distance-learning course connected with those chapters.

**5.** The deities usually have more than one name or epithet. Some, like Shiva and Vishnu, have numerous names, which are listed in works called *Sahasra-Nâma* ("Thousand Names") found in the *Mahâbhârata* and later works. For example, Shiva is also known as Rudra, Mahâdeva, Shambhu, Pashupati. The explanation for this diversity can be found partly in history and partly in the psychological attitudes of devotees. Shiva in the *Vedas* was a powerful, awe-inspiring leader of ghosts and spirits and embodied various forces of Nature. In subsequent periods, Shiva was given a higher position in the Hindu pantheon until, finally, he joined Vishnu and the Goddess as one of the most prominent objects of devotion. As the diverse traditions evolved, anthropomorphic ideas and also the insights of great realizers continued to shape and reshape the popular character of a given deity. Mythology and iconography have preserved a partial record of these changes throughout history.


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## Closeup on select Hindu deities

Hinduism is well known for its numerous deities. These are called *deva* or *devatâ* in the Sanskrit language. These two words are derived from the verbal root *div* meaning "to shine." According to popular conception, the male and female deities all have a specific "personality" and are associated with all sorts of stories, which the faithful take literally and the scholars understand to be pious fiction.

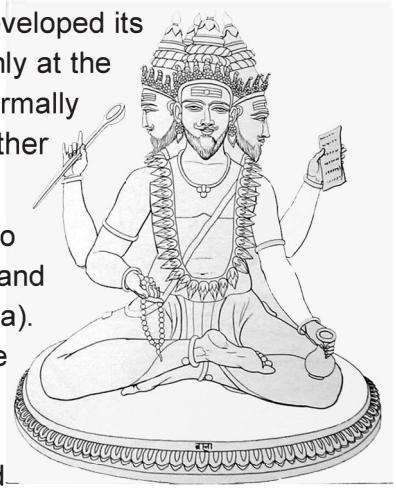
While for the devotee each chosen deity (*ishta-devatâ*) has ultimacy, metaphysically speaking, the diverse gods and goddesses reside only at a penultimate (subtle) level of existence. Beyond them lies the indefinable Absolute (*brahman*), which is wholly transcendental.

We can look upon the deities as beings similar to angels in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is also helpful to organize them into the four major strands of Hindu religion: orthodox Brahmanism, Shaivism (revolving around the worship of Shiva and his retinue), Vaishnavism (revolving around the worship of Vishnu and his retinue), and Shaktism (centering on the worship of the great Goddess).

### Deities of Brâhmanism

#### *Brahma*

Our brief overview ought logically to begin with Brahma, the Creator of the universe. Yet, curiously, popular Hindu religiosity has never developed its belief in Brahma into a prominent mode of worship. Apparently, only at the temple of Pushkara in Ajmer (or Ajmeer) in Rajasthan is Brahma formally worshiped, but he is often invoked in liturgical contexts along with other deities and most frequently in association with Shiva and Vishnu.



Although Brahma figures in the Purânic pantheon, he failed to gain popularity perhaps because he is not associated with colorful and powerful myths like Shiva or Vishnu (mainly in the form of Krishna). Brahma's character remained too abstract, too remote to ignite the pious imagination of ordinary people, much as God the Father in Christianity has not fired the imagination and worship of mainstream Christendom, yet his son and mediator—Jesus the Christ—and Jesus' mother in the form of the Virgin Mary gave rise to a religion that is now reckoned to comprise over one billion adherents.

According to popular mythology, Brahma is sometimes depicted as seated on a bull (really Shiva's mount) holding a lotus flower, which suggests that he was self-born arising spontaneously and parentless from a lotus flower before all space and time. More commonly, Brahma is associated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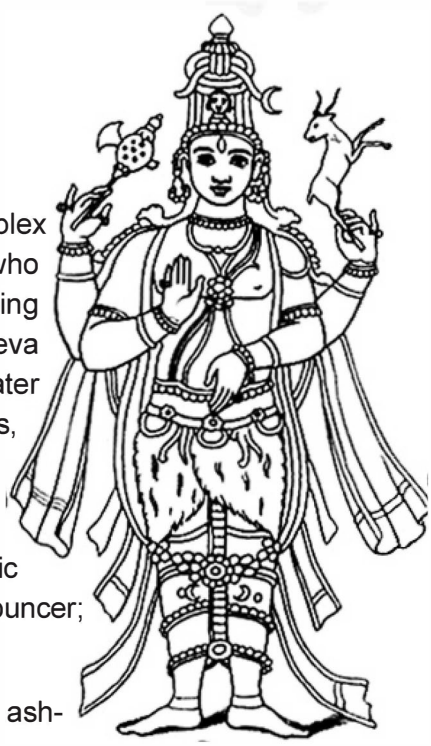
with a goose or the fabulous *garuda* (a type of eagle). Other myths tell of his birth from the cosmic egg. His life span is reckoned to be 100 eons, with a single day in the life of Brahma lasting 2,160,000,000 human years.

As the creator of the world, Brahma is also often called Prajâpati ("Lord of Creatures"), a name that goes back to the time of the *Rig-Veda*. According to epic mythylogy, Brahma supposedly had five heads, but one head was burned off by Shiva's wrath when Brahma failed to show the necessary respect to him. He is depicted with four arms and variously holds a sceptre, ladle, rosary (*mâlâ*), a bow, a water jug, or the text of the *Vedas* in his hands. His divine spouse is said to be Sarasvati, the goddess of speech and learning, who is also known as Brahmî.

### *Trimûrti*

During the so-called epic era, Brahma was turned by brahmin theologians into one of the three aspects of the metaphysical abstraction known as Trimûrti ("Triple Form"), or Trinity—a tripartite unity composed of Brahma (as Creator), Vishnu (as Preserver), and Shiva (as Destroyer). In the *Mahâbhârata* epic, the association between these three deities is still indeterminate and in formation, but in the *Purânas, the concept of a triad is clearly emerging*. Each deity is thought to represent one of the three modes (*guna*) of cosmic existence. Thus, Brahma represents *rajas*; Vishnu stands for *sattva;* Shiva represents *tamas*. The Purânic pantheon is essentially the same pantheon as found in modern Hinduism.

## Deities of Shaivism



### *Shiva* and *Pârvatî*

Historically, God Shiva ("Good") has had a rather complex development. In the *Vedas,* he was known as Rudra ("Roarer"), who was worshiped both as a healing deity and as a terrifying being associated with disease and stormy weather. First called Mahâdeva ("Great God") in the *Yajur-Veda,* Rudra-Shiva attained ever greater prominence in the post-Vedic era and acquired many names, notably Pashupati, Maheshvara, Îshana, and Bhava.

As a deity, Shiva is extraordinarily complex combining within himself both extremely ascetic traits and fierce hedoinistic characteristics. On the one hand, is the archetypal *yogin* and renouncer; on the other hand, he is a seducing Peter Pan.

In iconography, Shiva is depicted as a *yogin* with ash-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besmeared body (indicating his great renunciation), matted hair gathered into a top knot, and three eyes (the third eye in the middle between the eye brows being endowed with the power to heal or destroy). Seated on a tiger skin or on his mound Nandî (Nandin, "Delight,"), which is a bull, he is most commonly depicted in a state of deep meditative absorption. A crescent moon is fixed in his hair, and from his crown springs the holy River Gangâ (Ganges). In his four hands, Shiva respectively holds an hour-glass drum (*damaru*), a bow, a club (*khatvanga*), and a noose (or some other implement). He wears a necklace of skulls and a cobra (suggestive of the "serpent power" of which he is in full control). His neck is blue from drinking the poison generated during the whirling of the cosmos when the gods and demi-gods were fighting over supremacy. He dwells on the summit of Mount Kailâsa in the Himalayas, which represents the *axis mundi*.

Shiva's spouse is Pârvatî, or Mahâdevi ("Great Goddess"). Her other names are Umâ ("Light") and Gaurî ("Yellow"), and many more.

## *Ganesha*

Ganesha (or Ganapati), the elephant-headed deity, is among the most cherished deities worshiped in Hinduism. Among other things, he is venerated as the patron deity of Vedic astrology—a mantic art that is often used in traditional Yoga circles, notably Tantra. He is widely invoked as the remover of obstacles in mundane and spiritual matters.

Ganesha is also called Ganapati; both appellations suggesting that he is the head of the troops (*gana*) of minor deities associated with his divine parents Shiva and Pârvatî. He is depicted as a short fat human male with an elephant head, sporting a single tusk or one complete and one broken tusk. Four-armed, he holds a shell, a discus, a club, and a lotus in his hands. He is often portrayed as riding on a rat, but the earliest images show no vehicle (*vahana*) for Ganesha. From the myths, we can gather that the rat symbolizes the destructive aspect of existence, which Ganesha has fully conquered.

Many variant myths exist to explain Ganesha's elephant head. Most seem to agree that his human head was somehow cut off, and to keep him alive, the next best head at hand was used to revive him, and it happened to be an elephant's head. One tusk was severed by Parusharâma's magical axe when Ganesha dutifully blocked Parashurâma' entrance to Shiva's abode when the former came visiting unannounced. Parashurâma was the sixth incarnation (*avatâra*) of God Vishnu. Other mythological accounts exist to explain the loss of the one tusk. Symbolically, we may look upon this feature as a sign of Ganesha's compassion.

Ganesha is valued for his great wisdom—wisdom being associated with elephants—and the swiftness of his assistance. The epic tradition knows him as the only deity capable of following


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Sage Vyâsa's dictation of the *Mahâbhârata*.

### *Skanda or Kârttikeya*

According to mythology, Shiva has two sons, Ganesha and Skanda (or Kârttikeya). Unlike Ganesha, the latter deity manifest Shiva's warlike qualities. Skanda was born without a mother by Shiva spilling his semen into the fire. Because he was fostered by the Pleiades (Krittika), he came to be known as Kârttikeya. He was specifically born in order to destroy the titan Târaka, who threatened the gods.

## Deities of Vaishnavism

### *Vishnu*

Vishnu ("Pervader"), supposedly a "minor" deity at the time of the *Vedas,* achieve predominance in later times. He is grouped among the solar deities. In the *Rig-Veda,* he is described as crossing the universe in three steps, and brahmanical theology has connected these three strides with the Sun, lightning, and the element of fire (especially the sacrifical fire).

In the epic and purânic literature, Vishnu is often named Narâyana and depicted in human form, slumbering on the cosmic serpent Shesha (or Ananta, "Endless"). During his sleep, the entire universe is said to dissolve at the end of an eon, only to be reconstituted again in cyclic procession.

Vishnu is generally depicted as a handsome youth of dark blue complexion. His attire is that of a king. In his four hands he respectively holds a conch shell, a club, a lotus flower, and the magical *sudharsana* weapon, which is discus shaped. He is also endowed with a bow and a sword.

Vishnu is best known for his ten (or more) epiphanies called "incarnations" (*avatâra*): Matsya ("Fish"), Kûrma ("Tortoise"), Varâha ("Boar"), Narasimha ("Man-Lion"), Vâmana ("Dwarf"), Parashurama ("Râma with Axe"), Râma or Râmacandra ("Charmer/"Moonlike Charmer"), Krishna ("Black"), Buddha ("Awakened"), and Kalkin or Kalki (a warlike incarnation that is yet to come and will destroy the human world).

Vishnu's divine spouse is Lakshmî or Shrî, the goddess of good fortune. Their heavenly abode is Vaikuntha.


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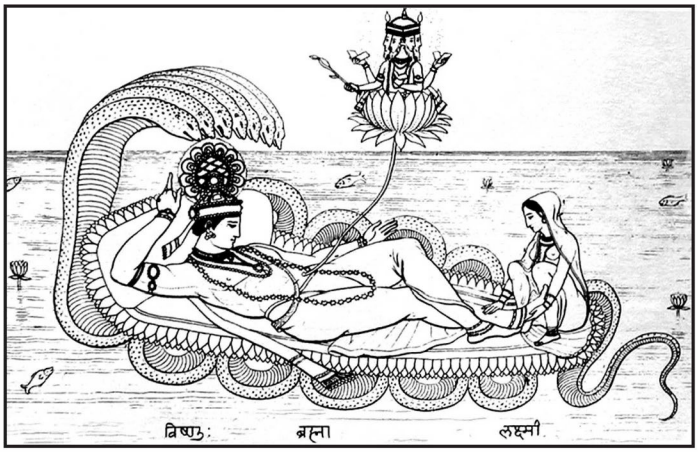
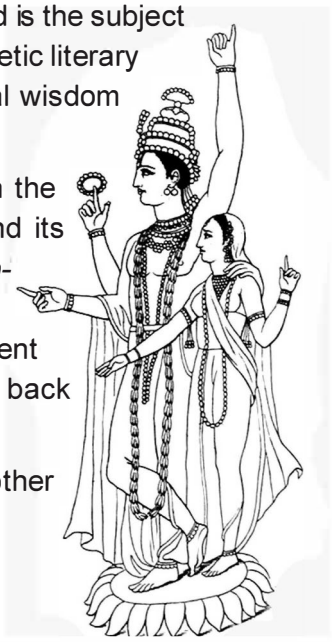
## *Krishna and Râdhâ*




Of Vishnu's incarnations, Krishna and Râma are the two most popular manifestations, and they figure prominently in many works of Yoga. Thus, Krishna is inextricably linked with the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* as the divine teacher of Prince Arjuna, while Prince Râma is the central figure of the voluminous *Yoga-Vâsishtha,* a significant medieval work on nondual (Vedântic) Yoga.

Krishna, the eighth and "full" incarnation, who is already referred to in the ancient *Châ*ndogya-Upanishad, has gained a huge following throughout India and is the subject of an enormous body of myths and legends, as well as theological and poetic literary compositions. He appears to be a divinized human being of exceptional wisdom and leadership.



The beginnings of the cultic worship of Krishna can be seen in the *Mahâbhârata,* especially in the *Hari-Vamsha* appendix to this epic, and its mature expression is found in the ninth-to-tenth-century *Bhâgavata-Purâna*. The religio-spiritual tradition that revolves around Krishna was popularized in the West through the Krishna Consciousness movement founded by Shrila Prabhupada (A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami) and going back to the great Bengali master Caitanya (1485–1533 A.D.).

Krishna's divine spouse is Râdhâ, who, like the other mother goddesses, has millions of worshipers in India.

## *Râma and Sîtâ*

Râma, another of Vishnu's human incarnations (*avatâra*) yet closely associated with God Indra, was born as the eldest son of King Dasharatha. He makes his first appearance in the *Mahâbhârata* epic, and his heroic lifestory is told in detail in the *Râmâyana* epic, which exists in two distinct recensions comprising many variations.

Iconography depicts Râma as a well-built, brawny man of dark blue complexion. His main weapon is the famous bow of Vishnu, which he alone was able to bend. He won Sîtâ's hand when he succeeded in shooting a fish through the left eye and through a revolving ring, while only seeing the fish's reflection.

Sîtâ, Râma's virtuous wife, who is said to be an incarnation of Goddess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Lakshmî, was abducted by the demon king of Shrî Lankâ, Râvana. Much of the story told in the *Râmâyana* revolves around her abduction and eventual rescue by Râma and his brother Lakshmana. An important ally in Râma's rescue mission was the monkey-shaped deity Hanumat (nominative: Hanumân), who served as military commander.

### *Sûrya*

God Sûrya has been known since Vedic times and is often equated with God Savitri ("Nourisher"), the benign gold-bodied solar deity who, among other things, is the original teacher of Yoga (under the name of Vivasvat; see the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* 4.1). Radiant Sûrya is typically depicted seated in a chariot drawn by seven horses or by a single horse emanating seven light rays.

### *Ashvins*

The horse-bodied, handsome, and eternally youthful Ashvins are God Sûrya's twin sons, who are specifically related to the morning twilight. They are the celestial physicians and as such are associated with healing in general and Âyur-Veda in particular.

## Deities of Shaktism

### *Devî* or *Shakti*

The Sanskrit terms *devî* ("goddess") and *shakti* ("power, energy") are applied to the divine feminine principle, Goddess in general. They are also used to refer to particular female deities, such as Pârvatî (Shiva's spouse), Râdhâ (Krishna's spouse), and Sîtâ (Râma's spouse).

In her benign form, the Goddess often goes by the name of Lakshmî ("Fortune"), Sundarî ("Beauty"), Lalitâ ("Playful one"), or Shrî ("Holy one"). Worshiped already at the time of the *Rig-Veda,* the great Goddess has a vast following in India. She is often understood as a complementary part of God envisioned as the divine male principle.

The great Goddess is fundamental to Tantra and Tantra-related schools and frequently is depicted as the teacher of Tantric secrets.

### *Kâlî*

Kâlî is the fierce and terrifying aspect of the Goddess. Portrayed as a dark-bodied warrior woman with fangs and protruding tongue and wide-open eyes. She brandishes a blood-dripping sword, wears a garland of skulls, and holds a severed head in one of her four hands. Two of her hands form the gestures (*mudra*) of dispelling fear and bestowing boons, which is meant to


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suggest that Kâlî also has a benign side.

She stands upon a corpse symbolizing Shiva in his resting mode. When Shiva is "dead" to the world, *kâla* (the principle of time) is active, which devours the universe. Kâlî's nudity suggests her omnipresence, while her black complexion indicates supreme potentiality on the one hand and universal chaos (before the beginning of time) on the other.

## *Durgâ*

Durgâ ("Inaccessible"), who is mentioned already in the *Mahâ-bhârata,* became a central figure in the post-Christian era. The most important early text celebrating this dark, fierce goddess is the *Devî-Mâhâtmya* ("Glory of the Goddess") embedded in the *Mârkandeya-Purâna,* which can be dated to c. 300 A.D. From earliest times on, Durgâ has been connected with bloody animal sacrifices, which are meant to appease her. Originally associated with the Krishna mythology, she came to be viewed as the wife of Shiva in classical Hinduism. An inveterate opponent of demons, radiant Durgâ is typically portrayed as riding a lion and bearing all sorts of weapons in her ten hands.

## *Târâ*

Târâ ("Transcender") embodies an important psychological and cosmic principle, namely that of transcendence, or the capacity to go beyond the limitation inherent in the body-mind and the cosmos at large. Goddess Târâ not surprisingly plays an important role in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. While in Hinduism, Târâ is typically portrayed in her fear-inspiring form (similar to Kâlî), the Buddhists and Jains prefer to depict and describe Târâ mainly in her benign form as rescuing beings from the world of change (*samsâra*). The Buddhist tradition knows of twenty-one Târâs—all aspects of the same liberating power.

A *thanka* painting of Green Târâ


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ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #41

# Relating to Traditional Yoga

by Georg Feuerstein

Traditional Yoga is either Hindu, Jaina or Buddhist. That is, it comes wrapped in a religious garb. For Western practitioners of Yoga, the question arises: How should one appropriately relate to the inherited format of the received Yoga teachings? Clearly, as beneficiaries of the age-old Yoga heritage, we should be respectful. At the same time, we should be true to our own cultural roots, whether we experience them as religious or secular.

In my view, "respectful" does not inevitably mean adopting yogic theories and practices uncritically. In the final analysis, this never works, because ideas and experiences become effective means of inner growth only when they are properly integrated.

Let's take the theological figure of Ganesha as an example. Obviously, Ganesha holds profound significance for Hindus. But there is nothing in our own religious background that would make mere belief in Ganesha meaningful to us—unless we can resonate with both the iconographic shape and the inner symbolism of the elephantine deity. As non-Hindus, we require more "information" about Ganesha to be able to "internalize" this deity. In the same vein, it would require some inner work on the part of a Hindu to relate appropriately to the theological figure of the Christ. A Hindu might understand Jesus as a historical individual and come to appreciate his teachings. But to accept the Christ, a deeper understanding and responsiveness would be called for. In their absence, a Hindu would most likely regard the Jesus/Christ as a divine "descent" (*avatâra*), paying no heed to the mainstream Christian doctrine of the Christ's uniqueness.

Ganesha is traditionally invoked at the beginning of Yoga practice in order to ensure that all obstacles to one's yogic practice are removed. For a Christian practitioner, this would make sense only if he or she would make two related assumptions: First, that Ganesha actually exists and has actual transformative power; second, that Ganesha's transformative power is stronger than that of the Christ. Otherwise, it would be more appropriate and sensical to invoke the Christ. In that case, it is still possible to be respectful of the Hindu practice of invoking Ganesha, but a Christian (or any other non-Hindu) would have to suspend judgment about whether Ganesha actually exists and actually possesses the claimed-for transformative power.


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Another good example from Hindu Yoga would be chanting the sacred syllable *om*. This has become a reasonably widespread practice among Western Yoga practitioners. Some might initially feel some reluctance or resistance when introduced to this technique, but the overwhelming majority appears to be able to adopt this *mantra* without great qualms. The *mantra om* has even made it onto T-shirts, which suggests that it has been subjected to desacralization and vulgarization.

It is conceivable that *om* recitation is for many Western adherents of Yoga a desacralized practice as well. If so, this would remove all conflict for religious adherents of Christianity, Judaism and other non-Hindu religious traditions who are committed to practicing Yoga. It would, however, be predictably offensive for pious Hindus, since the *om* symbol is their most sacred symbol, which stands for the ultimate Reality.

Now, when we examine the origins of Yoga, we find that traditionally Hindu and also Jaina Yoga has always been connected with religious motifs and ideas. In most yogic schools, Yoga is defined as "connecting/uniting" the psyche, or soul, with the Divine. This notion is immanent in the word *yoga* itself, which means literally "union."

The situation is somewhat different in Buddhist Yoga. Buddhism says nothing about an ultimate, divine Being with whom one ought to unite. It understands Yoga as a consciously engaged process of stripping away all mental conditioning, so that reality—whatever it may be—reveals itself as it is, without the usual distortions introduced by the unenlightened mind.

The Buddhist perspective is close to—but by no means identical with—the traditional Hindu concept of the impersonal *brahman* (the Absolute) as possessing no qualities and transcending all mental constructs. Again, this Hindu notion is potentially problematic for a Christian Yoga practitioner, because God is personal, not impersonal. I have, however, heard declared Christian Yoga practitioners adopt the concept of *brahman* as if they had absolutely no conflict with it. Either they subscribed to a mystical view of Christianity, which seemed unlikely to me, or they failed to carefully ponder the incompatibility between the Christian God and the Hindu *brahman*.

Had they pondered the distinction, they might have had to confront a whole spate of uninspected beliefs and ideas. This could have thrown them into much confusion, but it might also have helped them grow to a deeper understanding of their own religion and their own spirituality.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable things about encountering traditional forms of Yoga is the possiblity this affords to cultivate tolerance and to inspect our own mental constructs about the world and transcendental matters.

We come with so much intellectual baggage, some of it inherited from our parents and childhood teachers; some of it concocted by us along the way. There is no question in my mind that, in the end, we have to jettison all of it, so that we can encounter reality/Reality without the smokescreen of the unenlightened mind. The question is how we can undertake this crucial self-transformative work in the most efficient way possible?

More specifically, how can we grow spiritually through the contact with traditional expressions of Yoga? Growth, as I see it, as long as we engage this contact uncritically, without


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proper mindfulness.

This, again, makes study of the Yoga tradition, a must. If we practice without understanding and self-understanding, we are bound to miss the mark. As the *Gîtâ* (3.35) reminds us (paraphrased): "It is better to fulfill one's own law imperfectly than another's perfectly." What does this mean? In the context of the present consideration, it means that (a) we must find out what our innate or preexistent beliefs are; (b) how they concur or differ with the beliefs inherent in the traditional form of Yoga we are practicing, and (c) how we can meaningfully relate to—or adapt—our received yogic practice.

All Yoga practice contains some amount of Yoga theory, and we must learn to unpack that theory and also bring our own preconceptions to the for in order to grant ourselves the possibility of intellectual and also spiritual integration.


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ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #42

# Religion and Spirituality

by Georg Feuerstein

At the core of religion lies spirituality, which revolves around the twin ideals and practice of both self-transformation and self-transcendence to the point where reality reveals itself minus all preconceptions wether they be biases, doctrines, or theoretical tenets.

In the context of Christianity, this core spirituality is often referred to as mysticism; in Judaism, as Kabbalah; and in Islam, as Sufism. Thus, even the principal religions that subscribe to the belief in a Creator God, entertain an unconventional (spiritual) orientation and practice. In their most elevated forms, Hinduism and Buddhism, while also including a religious dimension, distinctly favor a spiritual, mystical outlook. This orientation is generally called Yoga.

Rather than seeing religion and spirituality as separate opposites, they are counterpoints in a whole spectrum of possibilities in humanity's approach to the ultimate mystery of existence, to the so-called Big Questions: Who am I? Whither do I go? What must I do? In my understanding, religion articulates a more conservative orientation, which effectively allows the ego-personality a great deal of latitude on the path of self-tranformation and self-transcendence. By contrast, spirituality makes more radical demands on the ego-personality and insists that it is possible and imperative to transcend the ego itself in favor of ultimate Reality (or the Godhead).

Religion is primarily *exoteric* practice vis-à-vis the ultimate Reality; spirituality is by nature *esoteric,* implying a certain breach with the conventional mind and its conventional cultural artifacts. From this perspective, religion represents a compromise with the ego-personality, while spirituality stands for a radical challenge to it. Another, perhaps more controversial way of expressing the difference, is to say that religion provides crutches for the ego-personality to sort of hobble along, while spirituality characteristically pulls the carpet from out under the imperfect ego-personality.

Religion, as Karl Marx observed, is "opium for the people." It has a tranquillizing effect that keeps the wheels of civilization going. Spirituality, by contrast, does not want either to tranquillize people nor particularly motivate them in their conventional pursuits (of wealth, health, pleasure, procreation, or even justice) but to guide them to mystical "ego death." This can be interpreted in the sense of "surrender to God's will" or "submission to Allah" on the one side and "the extinction


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of the empirical self" (Buddhism) and "merging with the Absolute" (Hinduism) on the other.

In grabbling with the concept of spirituality, the editor of *Religion in Today's World* made the following pertinent observations:

> [The] spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcenent dimension; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality.[1]

And:

> I believe that spirituality is a distinct discipline which can be distinguished from other disciplines by the nature of the religious experienc on which it reflects. . . . [T]his experience is not coextensive with the religion as a whole, nor with its theology or philosophy, nor with its historical, sociological, and anthropological dimensions, nor is it psychological in an exclusively modern sense, nor does it encompass all the phenomena studied in the history of religions. . . In fact, the systematic transmission of spiritual wisdom may be the oldest discipline in the world. . .[2]

Spirituality consists in the deliberate dismantling of the ego, or self, which by its very nature eclipses Reality however we may conceive it. Understandably, the radical approach of spirituality is upsetting, even terrifying, to the conventional religious individual who, from his or her distorted view, wants to yield to God just enough to be permitted into heaven. The last thing the ego-self wants is to step out of the way, to fade away, to make room for the larger Reality.

The spiritual practitioners, however, learn to find joy in the self-transcending path, which remains difficult only for those who have immature, wrong views of life and cannot face reality. When clarity and understanding dawn, the spiritual path is the only viable option for those who are committed to the reality principle and to the ending of suffering for themselves and others.

## Notes

1. Frank Whaling, ed., *Religion in Today's World: The Religious Situation of the World from 1945 to the Present Day* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), p. 319.

2. Ibid., pp. 322–323.


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**ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIALS #43**

# The Yoga of Jesus

by Georg Feuerstein

**Please be aware that this article contains views that would not be endorsed by Christian orthodoxy. Since there are no questions in the relevant Questionnaire 11 based on this essay, you may skip it.**

The Church of the East, which has an elaborate Web site (http://church-of-the-east.org), seeks to promote the "Yoga of Jesus." The church traces itself back to the year 52 A.D., when St. Thomas supposedly founded a branch of the early Christian community on the West coast of India. We are told that the Yoga of Jesus "is the lifestyle and mysticism of Jesus' message to the East." The essence of that message, we are told, is freedom from "conditioned thinking."

Jesus, in what is called the "great commission," charged his twelve apostles with spreading the good news (evangelion) throughout the world. If we can believe the writer (or editors) of the Gospel of John, Thomas (subsequently St. Thomas) was slow in recognizing Jesus' spiritual stature as the resurrected or "risen" Christ-hence the term "doubting Thomas." Yet historically, the early Christians appear to have looked upon St. Thomas as a great leader and even accorded him a status superior to that of the apostle Peter in Rome.

In this connection, we must bear in mind that the New Testament as we have it is a heavily edited document. After the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., the Church commissioned scholars (known as correctores) to align the gospels with current dogma. A major figure in attacking paganism and bolstering Church orthodoxy—especially the notion of the Holy Trinity—was the Spanish-born Roman emperor Flavius Theodosius. He was a fanatical Christian, under whose direction the First Council of Constantinople was convened in 381 A.D. over a period of two months. He is said to also have been directly responsible for burning the famous Alexandrian library to the ground in 389 A.D. As the more than 400,000 volumes went up in flames, inestimable knowledge inherited from ancient times was lost forever.


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After slaughtering 7,000 Thessalonians, the pious emperor received a letter of censure from a horrified St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, which contained the following lines: "Listen, august Emperor. I cannot deny that you have a zeal for the faith; I do confess that you have the fear of God. But you have a natural vehemence [read: aggression], which, if any one endeavors to soothe, you quickly turn to mercy; if any one stirs it up, you rouse it so much more that you can scarcely restrain it" (translated by Paul Halsall). In fact, St. Ambrose excommunicated the emperor, who was restored to the fold only after humbly doing penance for eight months. The excommunication illustrates well the enormous power the Church was by then wielding over secular and even political life—a power that proved a double-edged sword in the historical unfolding of Christendom.

When St. Thomas was still alive, the Christian community was in the formative stage of its development. Thomas "the Twin" was a fisherman by trade and was born in Galilee; it is not clear whose twin he was, though Gnostic tradition thought of him as the twin of Jesus himself. The three earlier gospels merely mention St. Thomas's name and only the Gospel of John pays somewhat more attention to him. It is in the Acts of the Apostles that we can learn more about him. His voyage to India, however, is described in some detail in the apocryphal Acts of Judas Thomas (Acta Thomae), which was first composed in Syriac and then rendered into Greek and appears to date back to the third century A.D. This text, which was rejected by the Church as inauthentic, portrays the apostle Thomas as a skilled carpenter, as was his brother Jesus. In the same work, Jesus is curiously described as having sold Thomas for twenty pieces of silver to the merchant Abbanes, who was an emissary of the Indo-Parthian King Gundaphorus. Abbanes had been looking for a skilled carpenter for his master to design and construct a palace for him.

According to legend, as recorded in the Acts of Judas Thomas, the king provided St. Thomas with a large sum of money to construct the palace, but the apostle liberally distributed the wealth among the poor. When after some time the ruler inquired about the project's status, St. Thomas told him that it was finished but that he would not see it until after his death, for he had built him a beautiful palace in heaven. The irate king condemned the apostle to death. Before the execution, however, the ruler's brother Gad died. Angels showed him the palace that St. Thomas had built, and Gad was eager to return to Earth to tell his royal brother about it. Miraculously he came back to life to report his discovery in heaven, and as a result Gundaphorus set St. Thomas free and converted to Christianity. The historicity of the king is beyond doubt, and local traditions insist on the veracity of the rest of the story.

To this day, there is a strong Christian community in Kerala (formerly Malabar) tracing its history back to St. Thomas. There are some 20 million Christians in India as a whole, nearly half of which live in Kerala. We may safely assume that for many centuries there was a lively connection between the early Christian diaspora in India and the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean churches. In due course, however, the Kerala Christians became more and more independent, and in the end appear to even have become oblivious to the existence of the Papacy in Rome.

In the process of crystallizing into Catholicism, early Christendom vigorously rejected Gnostic teachings like those contained in the Acts of Judas Thomas. These, however, continued underground as a constant creative "irritant" to the Christian Church. In rejecting the Gnostic


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heritage, the Church Fathers would seem to have discarded a portion of Jesus' own teachings. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumram and the Nag Hammadi Library, New Testament scholars and Christian theologians have had to rethink somewhat the spiritual legacy left by Jesus of Nazareth. There is now sufficient evidence to show that the Jesus remembered in mainstream Christianity is not quite the same as the historical Jesus.

Let us recall here that it took several centuries for the Church fathers to define the Christian canon and, based on current doctrine, to exclude certain texts as apocryphal or heretical. Moreover, the canonical gospels, as mentioned earlier, are all more or less heavily edited documents, which most likely do not faithfully reflect the teachings of Jesus or even the apostles.

The Nag Hammadi Library, consisting of more than 50 texts, was discovered in upper Egypt in 1945. This collection includes Gnostic scriptures such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, and the Gospel of Truth, which previously had been regarded as lost. The Gnostics were a prominent, if unorthodox, section within the early Christian community of the first century A.D. Even in the middle of the second century, the eminent Gnostic teacher Valentinus could still gather enough support to be considered for election as the bishop of Rome. Twenty years later, however, he was branded a heretic. Thereafter Gnostic teachings were systematically repressed and with them very likely a potent spiritual aspect of Jesus' legacy.

The fact that the early Christian community included Gnostic followers suggests that they found in Jesus' teaching sufficient support for a Gnostic interpretation. In other words, the notion that there is a spiritual side to his message—over and above any religious doctrines—is not as farfetched as it sounds. Morton Smith, in his important book The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark, has made a strong argument for the hidden magical side of Jesus (the miracle worker). In 1958 Smith, a professor at Columbia University, discovered a letter supposedly authored by St. Clement of Alexandria (second century A.D.) in which the bishop talks about a deleted portion of the Gospel of Mark.

That Judaism itself included an esoteric dimension is borne out by the existence of the Essenes, who have received scholarly attention since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Scrolls, which were discovered in 1947, make up a precious library of Jewish knowledge dating from the third century B.C. to 68 A.D. Apart from the 600 or so intact scrolls there also are tens of thousands of scroll fragments, which will keep scholars busy for years to come. An important part of the scrolls are documents thought to belong to the monastic sect of the Essenes, one of three leading Jewish sects, the others being the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Hebrews called the Essene sect the " School of Prophets" and the Egyptians named it "Healers, Physicians." They called themselves "Sons of Light."

The origin of this sect is obscure, and some writers have placed it in Parseeism, Pythagoreanism, and even Buddhism. Some of the elements in common with Christianity include the overall apocalyptic mood, the idea of a Messiah and a new covenant, opposition to temple priesthood, cultivation of the virtue of nonharming, the practice of baptism, and communal living. Despite the many similarities between the Essenes and the original Christian community, they represent distinct strands within Judaism. Most significantly, Jesus' plea for universal love differs


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strikingly from the Essene creed that demands loving the "Sons of Light" but hating the "Sons of Darkness." Even though some researchers have found it tempting to liken Jesus with the Essenes' "Teacher of Righteousness," there is little doubt today that he was not the leader or even a member of the Essenes and may even have warned against some of their practices (see the Gospel of Luke 16:8).

The discovery of the Essene writings, however, have opened the doors to inquiring into the historical-cultural influences upon their peculiar teachings, which, like Jesus' evangelion, are radically different from mainstream Judaism. They support the view that at the time of Jesus innovative teachings were promulgated, which possibly derived key elements from cultures farther east, notably India.

Obviously, Thomas's missionary work in India was no accident. Ever since establishing merchant ties with Sumer, India had been a great and steady influence on the Middle East and Northern Africa. We know from the Mitanni kingdom that this influence even assumed political proportions. If the Pharaonic Egyptians thought of the Greeks as children, they valued India as the home of sages. For whatever reason, Western scholars have almost systematically ignored India's contribution to the ancient world and the development of Western civilization—a most regrettable neglect that is only slowly being corrected.

This brings us to the figure of Jesus himself. The question presenting itself is: What was Jesus' relationship to India? Since he appears to have sent St. Thomas there, he was obviously aware of this looming Eastern giant. From everything we know about India's westerly tentacles, it would have been surprising if Jesus had been ignorant of it. But can we assume more? Can we, for instance, assume that he had specialized knowledge of India's spirituality or even that he visited India at some point in his life, as some writers have claimed?

As is well known, Jesus was the son of a carpenter and learned his father's respected trade. But there is this awkward and mystifying gap in his life history, the so-called "missing years" extending from age 12 (his charismatic appearance at the Temple) to 30 (his baptism by John). When he finally resurfaces, he is fully equipped with wisdom and knowledge. How and where did he acquire both?

According to the Gospel of Luke (2:51-52), Jesus went with his parents to live in Nazareth; hence his name "the Nazarene." The same is referred to in the Gospel of Matthew (2:23). It was customary for boys to study first the written Torah, then the oral Torah. A precocious and intelligent child, which Jesus seems to have been, could demonstrate considerable religious learning at a young age. We know from the Gospel of Luke (2:46) that at the age of twelve, Jesus was discussing religious matters in the temple, astonishing his elders by his learning and wisdom. In modern India, for instance, Swami Veda Bharati had memorized the *Vedas* (over 1,000 hymns!) by age seven and gave public discourses on them at the age of eleven. Thus while Jesus was certainly unusual, there is absolutely no reason to assume he acquired his knowledge outside of Judaism and in some remote land.

Even though Jesus' teaching contains innovative aspects, in many ways it is derived from


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and suffused with traditional Judaism. According to the testimony of the Gospel of Matthew (5:17), Jesus himself said: "Do not think I have come to destroy the Law or the prophets. I have not come to destroy but to fulfill." That is to say, he did not see his task as carving out a completely new path, as did Gautama the Buddha, but as one of completing the work of Moses and the other prophets.

What, then, are we to make of stories that place Jesus in India, Kashmir, and Tibet during the so-called "missing years"? I believe we need to treat them in the same way we would treat a claim that Jesus visited Mexico, Brazil, the Andes, Japan, and Polynesia. All these regions remember a visiting "white" culture hero who is identified with Jesus. There is not a trace in the gospels of Jesus having traveled around the globe to spread his teaching; rather he commissioned the apostles to do so, and their reach seems to have stretched from Kerala to Rome.

According to the Gospel of Matthew (2:13-15), the only foreign country Jesus ever visited was Egypt. He was an infant then, and his parents fled Nazareth in order to escape the murderous plot of Herod, whom Rome had appointed as tetrarch of Galilee. If the journey to Egypt is historical, Joseph and his family returned to Galilee right after Herod's death, which occurred very probably in 1 A.D. (and not as widely assumed 4 B.C., based on one of several lunar eclipses in that period), thus placing Jesus' birth somewhat earlier than this date. As the Gospel of Matthew (2:19) would have it, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him of the ruler's demise and ordered him to take his family back to Israel.

The various stories that place Jesus in other parts of the world are most likely pious fabrications, perhaps based on vague recollections of an early Christian missionary mixed with memories of a local culture hero. None of these stories have proven verifiable, but there is plenty of evidence for Jesus' honoring and promoting his own Jewish heritage.

Some scholars have clearly overemphasized the innovativeness of Jesus' teaching, arguing that his teaching is really irreconcilable with Judaism. But this seems to be an extremist position. There are many core aspects to Jesus' teaching that are irrevocably integral to Judaism: First, Jesus had the highest regard for the authority of the Torah, which he had no intention to undermine. Second, he fully accepted the Jewish doctrine of the Kingdom of God. Third, he engaged in miraculous and occult activities, as did the earlier prophets. Fourth, he understood himself to be the long-awaited messiah.

We need not assume, with Morton Smith, that Jesus' magical acts were derived from Roman popular culture, for they fit in well with what we know of the magical practices and miracle working of contemporaneous Judaism. These activities were in fact closely tied to the demonstration of the coming of the Kingdom of God—an eschatological idea fundamental to Judaism. For Jesus, however, the Kingdom of God was imminent, and he presented his teaching as a key to the heavenly realm.

The rejection of both Jesus as the anticipated messiah and his claim of the imminence of the Kingdom of God crystallize the axiomatic difference between Judaism and Christianity. But this rejection does not deny the Jewish ancestry of either Jesus or his teaching. Let us not


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forget that after Herod's death and until the beginning of the Jewish War in 66 A.D. leading to the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem four years later, several Jews claimed to be the messiah; only Jesus is still remembered today.

One more point remains to be examined, and this is the nature of the Jewish faith at the time of Herod. Clearly, Judaism at that time was no longer the Judaism of Moses, who lived 1300-1500 B.C. In 586 B.C., the Babylonians, under Nebuchadnezzar, had dealt a blow to the heart of the Jews by razing the first temple in Jerusalem, where King David had brought the Ark of the Covenant in 1004 B.C. During the Babylonian exile, synagogues, where prayers rather than rituals were offered to God, came to replace the temple and transformed Judaism in a significant way.

Under the hegemony of the Seleucids, a Macedonian dynasty founded by Seleucus, a general in the army of Alexander the Great, Hellenism increasingly affected Jewish culture in Palestine. Antiochus IV (175-163 B.C.) even went so far as to declare Jerusalem a Greek city. It was during the oppressive reign of the Seleucids that apocalyptic teachings gained in prominence. The Book of Daniel, composed c. 160 B.C., is characteristic of the spirit of that time. The Jewish community split itself into three factions—the Essenes (who were the most conservative faction opting for an ascetical messianic lifestyle), the Pharisees (who were religious liberals but fomented against Hellenism), and the Saducees (who were religious conservatives believing only in the written Torah but who favored Hellenism).

Hellenism was the sophisticated world of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Phidias, Praxiteles, and Sophocles enriched by countless contacts with other cultures. Favoring such ideals as individualism, personal freedom, tolerance, recognition of the female gender, philosophical syncretism, and not least rationality, Hellenism was attractive to all but the most insensitive. Yet it also opened wide the doors to skepticism, indiscriminate irreverence, intellectual snobbery, social fragmentation, and ruthless egocentrism. Nevertheless, it proved foundational to the evolution of Judaism and, via Christianity, Western civilization.

Hellenism must not be regarded as solely the product of native Greek culture. It is rather an assemblage of many cultural influences, which all were distilled by the adventurous Greek spirit. In the pre-Hellenic period, the cultures of Assyria and Persia exercised a great influence on ancient Greece, and the Greek mystery cults of Orpheus and Dionysus as well as Pythagoreanism (based on Orphism), can be seen as direct results of that influence. The Mitanni had kings with Indo-Iranian names (i.e., Sutarna, Tushratta) and very likely also an Indian heritage, while the Persians were linked to India via the Zoroastrians, who have a strong connection to the Vedic tradition.

Thus behind Hellenism can be said to loom the cultural giant of India—a barely appreciated historical fact because India's greatness in antiquity has still not been properly appreciated despite recent archaeological and historical discoveries. India's cultural complex is now dated back to the town of Mehrgarh whose beginnings lie in the seventh millennium B.C. The Indian culture peaked with the Indus-Sarasvati civilization (3000-1900 B.C.) whose sheer geographical size of c. 250,000 square miles bespeaks of a large population that eclipsed the population of other


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Neolithic cultures, notably Sumer and Egypt. The cultural achievements of ancient India are only gradually being recognized, and a thorough reappraisal of India's contribution to the development of human civilization is long overdue.

To summarize, St. Thomas's mission to India suggests that the ties between India and the Middle East were perhaps closer than hitherto thought. If Jesus himself visited India, as some local Indian traditions claim, then both the early orthodox and heterodox (Gnostic) Christian authorities are curiously silent about it. The authenticity of those local Indian traditions is definitely questionable. The "missing" years in Jesus' life, moreover, are not at all mysterious given the socioreligious context of Judaism. According to the gospels, Jesus grew up in keeping with the social mores of his culture.

At the same time, long-established trade routes (such as the many-threaded Silk Road) running from India and still farther east all the way to the Mediterranean, unquestionably promoted the flux of ideas between cultures. The influence of Persia—via Zoroastrianism and Mithraism—on Judaism is a well-established fact. The "Yoga" of Jesus is best understood as a product of Judaism during the so-called "Intertestamental period" (334 B.C. to the birth of Jesus) and of Jesus' own unique personality as a messiah, miracle-worker, healer, and charismatic rabbi.

We need not assume that he was personally initiated into, or even informed about, any Indian yogic teachings. Even if he was exposed to migrant Indian scholars with some knowledge of Yoga, his teaching and mission can be satisfactorily explained on the basis of Judaism and the syncretistic philosophical movements at work during his era. In other words, it was home grown. The New Age notion of Jesus as a full-fledged yogin trained in the Himalayas appears to be due to historical myopia. Therefore we may speak about his teaching as a form of Yoga only by way of comparison. Also, whatever influence Jesus may have had in India, it apparently was solely due to the missionary activities of his followers, starting with St. Thomas.


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## FOR REFLECTION

1. Any discussion of Hindu religion/spirituality will naturally overlap with Hindu philosophy. In shedding light on this vital yet elusive interface between Hindu religion and philosophy, we hope to understand something of the nature of Yoga as a whole. Let us be clear that not all members of a particular religious community within the fold of Hinduism necessarily share the same philosophical ideas. For example, Shankara was a teacher of Vedânta but in his religious life was partial to Vaishnavism or, as some claim, Shaivism. Similarly, some Vaishnavas may lean philosophically toward Upanishadic Vedânta, while others may rely solely on the *Âgamas* or the scriptures of their particular school. Yoga made its home in a large number of religious and philosophical traditions in India. This reflects something of the all-comprising nature of the Absolute, which contains within itself infinite possibilities. How do your own religious beliefs and sentiments mesh with your philosophical ideas? Why is this an important question?

2. The word "religion" is derivable from two Latin words—*religare* meaning "to connect back" (from *ligare,* "to bind") and *relegere* meaning "to conscientiously attend to." In what sense can Yoga be said to imply both these connotations? How does religion in this twofold sense apply to your own Yoga practice?

3. According to a recent poll by Environics Research Group, 60 percent of Canadians agree with the statement "I'm not a religious person, but I am a spiritual person." How do you view the distinction between religion and spirituality?

## REMEMBER

As we noted before, we recommend that you write your responses to "For Reflection" and also to the Homework questions in your notebook. Many students have found this very helpful in assimilating yogic ideas and making them relevant to their daily life and spiritual practice.


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# QUESTIONNAIRE #11

Please SUBMIT this questionnaire to TYS: tyslearning@sasktel.net
Don't forget to include your full name, email address, date, and course title. Please refer to our instructions on p. 17.

**1. What does the term *sanâtana-dharma* mean?** *(Check one)*

(a) profound morality
(b) perennial ethics
(c) perennial spiritual teaching
(d) eternal philosophy

**2. What does *Sahasra-Nâma* mean?***(Check one)*

(a) Highest Praise
(b) Thousand Names
(c) Thousand Praises
(d) Innumerable Names

**3. Which of the following statements about Mount Kailâsa is correct?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) it is the abode of Vishnu
(b) it is Shiva's mountain
(c) it is the divine home of Pârvatî
(d) it is the abode of Krishna

**4. Which of the following is a name of Shiva?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) Rudra
(b) Indra
(c) Mahâdeva
(d) Savitri
(e) Shambhu
(f) Pashupati
(g) Vishnu
(h) Krishna


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**5. Which goddess is known as "Transcender"?** *(Check one)*

(a) Umâ
(b) Sîtâ
(c) Târâ
(d) Durgâ

**6. Which of the following goddesses is Shiva's spouse?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) Pârvatî
(b) Râdhâ
(c) Umâ
(d) Brahmî
(e) Sîtâ

**7. According to classical Hinduism, who is the creator of the universe?** *(Check one)*

(a) Ganesha
(b) Skanda
(c) Shiva
(d) Brahma
(e) Vishnu

**8. What is *brahman?*** *(Check one)*

(a) the created universe
(b) the Creator
(c) the Absolute

**9. Which Hindu deity is particularly associated with the removal of obstacles?** *(Check one)*

(a) Shiva
(b) Vishnu
(c) Ganesha
(d) Skanda


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# QUESTIONNAIRE #12

Please SUBMIT this questionnaire to TYS: tyslearning@sasktel.net
Don't forget to include your full name, email address, date, and course title.

**1. What does the term *svâdhyâya* mean*?*** *(Check one)*

(a) spiritual
(b) self-inquiry
(c) study
(d) education

**2. Which major ancient Sanskrit text defines Yoga as *samatva* (balance)?** *(Check one)*

(a) *Rig-Veda*
(b) *Brihad-Âranyaka-Upanishad*
(c) *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*
(d) *Yoga-Sûtra*

**3. Which modern Yoga master and philosopher availed himself of the concept of evolution to expound the teachings of Yoga?** *(Check one)*

(a) Aurobindo Ghose
(b) Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan
(c) Mahatma Gandhi
(d) L. B. G. Tilak

**4. Who mentions the possibility of "truth-bearing" (*ritambhara*) knowledge in his work?** *(Check one)*

(a) Krishna
(b) Patanjali
(c) Tirumûlar
(d) Goraksha
(e) Shankara

The correct answer can be found in this Study Guide or *The Yoga Tradition* book.


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**5. Which of the following does the term *pratyaksha* denote?** *(Check one)*

(a) verbal testimony
(b) tradition
(c) sensory inhibition
(d) sense perception

**6. According to Sâmkhya, which is the twenty-fifth ontological principle?** *(Check one)*

(a) *purusha*
(b) *prakriti*
(c) *buddhi*
(d) *ahamkâra*

**7. In yogic symbolism, which deity most distinctly represents inner luminosity?** *(Check one)*

(a) Shiva
(b) Vishnu
(c) Sûrya
(d) Krishna
(e) Pârvatî

**8. Who is the central deity of the *Bhâgavata-Purâna*?** *(Check one)*

(a) Shiva
(b) Vishnu
(c) Krishna
(d) Râma

**9. What does the term *tapas* convey?** *(Check one)*

(a) renunciation
(b) asceticism
(c) dispassion
(d) liberation

**10. What is the traditional name of the Yoga of discerning wisdom?** *(Check one)*

(a) Râja-Yoga
(b) Tantra
(c) Samnyâsa-Yoga
(d) Jnâna-Yoga


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**11. Which of the following best describes Jnâna-Yoga?** *(Check one)*

(a) metaphysical
(b) philosophical
(c) pluralistic
(d) dualistic
(e) monotheistic
(f) nondualistic

**12. What is meant by *jîvan-mukta*?** *(Check one)*

(a) sainthood
(b) liberation while yet alive
(c) liberation after death
(d) the adept who enjoys living liberation
(e) none of the above

**13. To which type of Yoga does the saying "You Are That" belong?** *(Check one)*

(a) Hatha-Yoga
(b) Râja-Yoga
(c) Karma-Yoga
(d) Jnâna-Yoga
(e) Bhakti-Yoga
(f) Tantra

**14. Who is said to have composed the *Nirvâna-Shatka*?** *(Check one)*

(a) Krishna
(b) Shankara
(c) Gautama the Buddha
(d) Vyâsa
(e) Vidyâranya

**15. To which larger religio-cultural tradition does the Pâncarâtra school belong?** *(Check one)*

(a) Vaishnavism
(b) Shaivism
(c) Shaktism
(d) Brahmanism


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**16. Roughly when was the important *Bhâgavata-Purâna* composed?** *(Check one)*

(a) 1200-900 A.D.
(b) 900-500 A.D.
(c) 500-100 A.D.
(d) pre-Christian era

**17. Which of the following best describes the concept of *preman?*** *(Check one)*

(a) supreme realization
(b) liberation
(c) spiritual love
(d) earthly love

**18. In which tradition does the concept of divine play hold a central position?** *(Check one)*

(a) Brahmanism
(b) Shaivism
(c) Vaishnavism
(d) Shaktism

**19. Which deity is said to be an "incarnation" (*avatâra*) of Vishnu?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) Brahma
(b) Ganesha
(c) Shiva
(d) Kalkin
(e) Krishna
(f) Râma

**20. Which medieval authority discussed in detail the five sentiments (*rasa*) of love-devotion?** *(Check one)*

(a) Shankara
(b) Caitanya
(c) Rûpa Gosvâmin
(d) Mânikkavâcakar
(e) Tirumûlar


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**21. Who is said to be the author of the *Bhakti-Sûtra*?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) Shândilya
(b) Caitanya
(c) Nârada
(d) Shankara

**22. Which of the following statements holds true of a practitioner of Bhakti-Yoga?** *(Check one)*

(a) in order to realize God, he or she must deny all emotions
(b) God-realization is possible only with heightened emotionality
(c) only pure emotions lead to God
(d) God accepts even impure emotions for worship

**23. What is the correct Sanskrit term for revelation?** *(Check one)*

(a) *shabda*
(b) *pratyaksha*
(c) *âgama*
(d) *shruti*
(e) *shravana*

**24. Who said "Yoga is skill in action?"** *(Check one)*

(a) Mahatma Gandhi
(b) Krishna
(c) Arjuna
(d) Dhritarashtra

**25. Is it correct to say that the Âlvârs were saints from Northern India?** *(Check one)*

(a) yes
(b) no

**26. Which of the following holds true?** *(Check one)*

(a) the concept of *mantra* is integral to Mantra-Yoga only
(b) the concept of *mantra* is integral to all branches of Yoga
(c) the concept of *mantra* is integral to some branches of Yoga


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**27. What was the Vedic equivalent of the concept of Yoga?** *(Check one)*

(a) *darshana*
(b) *kratu*
(c) *rishi*
(d) *tapas*
(e) *jnâna*

**28. Which of the following traditions consider the ideal of renunciation higher than the householder state?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) Karma-Yoga
(b) Jnâna-Yoga
(c) Theravâda Buddhism
(d) Jainism

**29. What does the term *adhyâtmika-vidyâ* specifically refer to?** *(Check one)*

(a) Âyur-Veda
(b) Patanjali's eightfold path
(c) spiritual discipline
(d) a Hindu philosophical system

**30. Which of the following statements are correct?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) the system of Pûrva-Mîmâmsâ is closely related to Jnâna-Yoga
(b) the practical aspect of Vedânta is also known as Jnâna-Yoga
(c) the system of Uttara-Mîmâmsâ is the same as Vedânta

**31. What did Shankara teach?** *(Check one)*

(a) the world is real but separate from God
(b) the world does not exist
(c) the world exists but is unreal

**32. What did Kapila teach?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) the world is a product of *prakriti*
(b) the world was created by God
(c) the world is separate from the transcendental Self"
(d) the transcendental Self is eternally conscious
(e) the world is a play between the three *gunas*


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**33. Which of the following teachers were Sâmkhya authorities?** *(Check one or more)*

(a) Kapila
(b) Îshvara Krishna
(c) Shankara
(d) Vijnâna Bhikshu

**34. Is Âyur-Veda one of the six classical systems (*darshana*) of Hinduism?** *(Check one)*

(a) yes
(b) no

**35. Would it be correct to say that there has been a close connection between Yoga and alchemy?** *(Check one)*

(a) yes
(b) no

**36. Which of the following statements is correct?** *(Check one)*

(a) the Purânic pantheon is essentially the same as the Vedic pantheon
(b) the Purânic pantheon is noticeably different from the Vedic pantheon
(c) the Purânic pantheon paints the Vedic deities in a new light
(d) the Purânic pantheon outright dismisses the Vedic deities

**Please submit your answers to the above questionnaire and indicate to your tutor which essay you have chosen to work on (see next page).**


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# FINAL ESSAY

To qualify for a certificate of completion, you must submit an essay and your answers to all the Questionnaires to TYS at tyslearning@sasktel.net. For submissions, please refer to p. 17.

For a Practical Alternative to the Essay, please see p. 372.

Please consult the information *Practical Guidelines* (SG, pages 17–19). **Your essay must include references to traditional concepts**. You may select one of the following topics for your essay:

- **Make a detailed comparison between traditional Yoga discipleship and contemporary student requirements and attitudes.**
- **Explain the various ways in which ego-transcendence is accomplished in Yoga and how this is relevant today.**
- **Yoga as a healing art**
- **What spiritual liberation means to me and what it means in traditional Yoga.**

**Please don't forget to add to your essay**
**one or two short paragraphs summarizing how this course**
**has (or has not) helped you**
**in your understanding of Yoga and your inner growth.**


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## ALTERNATIVE TO THE ESSAY

If writing an essay would cause you distress but you would still like to complete this course, we will consider a practical alternative. Please send us a reasonably detailed proposal for a socially worthwhile project (such as initiating a free Yoga class for the underprivileged or organizing neighbors to regularly help out doing chores for sick or elderly people). State how, when, where, and why. This must be a NEW project, and in the end we will require a signed testimonial by at least one of the beneficiaries unrelated to you. You must also participate in the project until it is off the ground and has a reasonable chance of continuing into the foreseeable future. Allow your compassion to run free. In order to qualify for a TYS Certificate of Completion, you also must submit a simple concluding statement about the project (at least 1 page).


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If you have diligently worked your way through this distance learning course, you deserve our sincere congratulations. We hope that your studies have deepened your understanding of Yoga, strengthened your faith in this ancient tradition, and given you plenty of encouragement to continue to study and practice Yoga for the rest of your life.

**OM SHANTI**


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